

THE MAKING AND MEANING OF I'LL TAKE MY STAND:
A STUDY IN UTOPIAN-CONSERVATISM, 1925-1939

A Thesis

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by

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PREFACE

In November, 1961, thirty-one years after the first publication of I'll Take My Stand, Harper and Brothers will issue its second edition of 10,000 paperbacks. That a collection of twelve essays on the South and the agrarian tradition--a book considered anachronistic even in 1930--should now be regarded as having so potential an appeal may seem less quixotic if the character of the symposium and its effects are seen as they should be--in their social, economic, political and aesthetic contexts.

Although several studies exist which focus on the literary character and achievements of members of the group, these have often tended to dismiss or even to deprecate the Agrarian "phase" as "reactionary" or "extra-literary"--and therefore not to be taken seriously. It is my conviction that an apprehension of this Agrarian activity is necessary for a fuller appreciation of their ideas and achievements as critics, poets, or novelists. Far from being irrelevant to an understanding of specifically literary and critical performances, Agrarian views and activities serve to illuminate the work and to direct and focus the careers of most of the group, either as reaction against, or as reflection or continuation of positions they had taken as Agrarians. This study, therefore, is an attempt to suggest or reconstruct the events, ideas, and interplay of personalities which resulted in the formulation of an Agrarian philosophy subscribed to by eight men of letters, two social scientists, a journalist, and a psychologist; to indicate both immediate effects and later indirect reflections; and finally, to evaluate the group's Agrarian philosophy as well as their activities not only on the basis of their own assumptions and expectations but also as their views are related to the

character and needs of the culture with which they were concerned.

As my title indicates, the "making" of I'll Take My Stand has been a central consideration in this study. Reconstructed on the basis of letters, unpublished documents, personal interviews, and various scattered fugitive publications as well as those of a more substantial character, my account of how the symposium came into being is necessarily extensive and detailed. The "beginning" and "concluding" dates--1925 and 1939--have been determined by events singled out by the Agrarians themselves and by such evidence as a marked decrease in the publication of Agrarian-oriented articles and books and a dispersal of the group from the South to other locales and other areas of activity.

The genesis of the Agrarian symposium as such can be dated from the Scopes trial; and its demise was apparent by the beginning of World War II. But its seeds had been sown in the early twenties, when some of the group had gathered to exchange ideas and criticize each other's writings--at first informally, later as a group of Fugitive poets, and finally as active contributors and elected editors to The Fugitive. This study therefore reaches back to touch upon these earlier evidences of communal association, to interweave the threads of Southern locale and background, similar interests and common convictions, and thus to reveal how these links inevitably led to a group-expression. Being Southerners all, imbued with an intense love of their region, eager to preserve a coherent view of life which they found in their history and culture, and meeting at Vanderbilt in an atmosphere of gentility and humane learning which had not yet succumbed to the sciences, these Twelve joined in a cause to deplore the forces of disorder at work in a New South and to affirm values inherent in an agrarian way of life.

From the vantage point of hindsight, it seems not at all surprising that the Agrarian group formed and, in the course of expressing and sharing ideas, developed a symposium

and a programme for which the term "strategy" with all its military connotations is not inappropriate.

Not all of the group were at Vanderbilt during the years of planning the symposium, but the close ties formed earlier through proximity or shared views engendered discussions and correspondence that culminated in the publication of I'll Take My Stand, a collection of essays suffused with the individuality of each member's interests and personality yet bound together not only manifestly by the Statement of Principles but also intangibly by fundamental common values. Its impact was evident in the vigorous reactions appearing in the press as well as in academic circles, and the Agrarians in response engaged "enemy" forces in public debates and round-table discussions, and in a proliferation of articles reinforcing their stand.

The fact that this cause was impractical has not been the primary concern of this study. Rather, it is my intention to show how the symposium and its defenses represented a utopian-conservative philosophy which has been, in some respects, a reflector of the temper of our era; in others a resistance against the economic, political, and social drifting toward standardization and centralization.

This could well have been a study of twelve individuals who at one period in their careers called themselves Agrarians. But the symposium was the result of a group effort and has been so reconstructed and analyzed. This is not to imply that the individual contributors were insignificant except for their membership in the group; the biographical sketches which constitute a considerable portion of the Appendix material offer irrefutable evidence to the contrary. But these appear for other reasons: to provide a background and a chronological structure against which to view the agrarian ideas of each individual within the context of his own career; to suggest the extent to which attitudes shared by the group were reinforced or repudiated in the later careers of the contributors, and to indicate the character of their achievements. Each sketch is interpretive and may be read quite independently of the body

of the study, although material within the main text amplifies observations that may appear insufficiently substantiated otherwise. On the other hand, the group-nature of the symposium is clear in the Manifesto. Its present relative inaccessibility in complete form has led me to reproduce this Statement of Principles in Appendix A along with an earlier version, "Articles of an Agrarian Reform."

The difficulties adherent to writing about living people were manifold, challenging, and not always surmountable. The letters and unpublished documents quoted or paraphrased in the discussion of the Agrarian movement represent a good portion but by no means all of the material available. In particular, correspondence by John Gould Fletcher as well as a number of letters by other Agrarians to Robert Penn Warren and Andrew Lytle are relatively untouched. These may be available in the future.

A few words remain to be said about the quantity, the frequency, and extensiveness of quoted material. Many of the statements are from unpublished letters or from sources not easily accessible, such as reviews published before the symposium but not collected or indexed for ready consultation. These are quoted at length, not only to represent the attitudes and tone of the writers but also to allow them as Agrarians to speak in their own voice and to give the reader, on the basis of his own examination of the evidence, an opportunity to judge the soundness of my interpretation and conclusions.

The analysis, interpretations and evaluations I make are my own, and any errors which appear are to be attributed to my human and intellectual limitations, not to those individuals who have been so patient and generous with their time and encouragement.

My correspondence with all of the living Agrarians, with members of their families, or with their friends and friendly critics has been extensive and illuminating. I have been privileged, through the kindness of Donald Davidson, to examine and take notes on material from the Agrarian file

containing unpublished letters, memoranda, newspaper and periodical reviews of the symposium, and a variety of other documents.

Merely to list the names of those who were so understanding in granting me permission to quote from their husband's or their own unpublished material is inadequate acknowledgment of my indebtedness. Passages from four letters by John Gould Fletcher--to John Cournos, June 1, 1920, and to Allen Tate, August 10, 1927, November 19, 1930, and December 19, 1930--have been quoted under copyright claim with the permission of Mrs. John Gould Fletcher. For their generosity and assistance, I express my grateful thanks to Donald Davidson, Lyle Lanier, Andrew Lytle, Herman Clarence Nixon, Mrs. Frank L. Owsley, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and John Donald Wade; also to Lambert Davis, Director of the University of North Carolina Press; Paul T. David, Director of Governmental Studies, Brookings Institution; Roman Horne, Secretary, International Monetary Fund; Don K. Price, on the faculty of Harvard University and formerly a Vice-President of the Ford Foundation; A. D. Spottswood, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development; Mrs. Alice D. Harris, Administrative Office of the Division of Personnel, TVA; Rufus Terral, editorial writer for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch; Leonard Casper, Boston College; Louis D. Rubin, Jr., Hollins College; and Bernard Schilling, University of Rochester. To Charles O. Bissell, Art Director of the Nashville Tennessean Magazine I am indebted for a photograph and permission to reproduce his cartoon of the "three little Agrarians" which appeared as a cover for Vanderbilt University's Masquerader.

Whatever "living" quality the study has captured is the result to a great extent of the recollections in interviews and conversations with Donald Davidson, Lyle Lanier, Andrew Lytle, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Stringfellow Barr, Paul T. David, Roman Horne, and A. D. Spottswood.

For the use of material in print for which special permission was necessary, I am grateful to Harcourt, Brace and

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Special assistance was rendered by the staffs of Harvard University Library, the Joint University Libraries at Nashville, the University of Michigan Library, the University of Minnesota Library, the New York Public Library, Princeton University Library, and Yale University Library. At Princeton the rich and extensive collection of letters to Allen Tate was made available to me, and at Yale University the John Gould Fletcher collection of published works and articles, and unpublished notebooks, manuscripts, and fugitive pieces is held.

A fellowship and two summer grants have in no small way been responsible for the character of this study, and I wish to express here my appreciation to the American Studies Program of the University of Minnesota for two of these grants: a Carnegie Fellowship that not only made possible a year free for study but also enabled me to launch my research into primary materials with a trip to Vanderbilt University and the Fugitives' Reunion in 1956 and a Carnegie Foundation summer grant which allowed me to visit libraries in the East and to travel to New York, Princeton, Nashville, Kenyon College, and the University of Illinois for interviews. To the Montclair State College Alumni Association of New Jersey I am also grateful for a summer grant, permitting me to work without interruption on my manuscript.

My debt to my academic mentors and friends is equally great: to Professor Norman Holmes Pearson of Yale University I am grateful for encouragement and for permitting me to see his file of John Gould Fletcher letters which he has been collecting over a number of years; to Joe Lee Davis, Professor of American Literature at the University of Michigan, and Professors Clarke Chambers, David Noble, and J. C. Levenson of the University of Minnesota I am indebted for patient reading of my manuscript, detailed, corrective criticisms, and suggested lines of thought which have proved provocative and fruitful.

Finally, to Mulford Q. Sibley, director of this study, who has been throughout a never-failing support in my periods of doubt, I express inadequately appreciation for his initial willingness to be my chairman, admiration for his wisdom and insights, and a hope that in some small degree this work suggests my indebtedness to his humane understanding.

PART I

THE EXTERNALITIES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Less than a year after the catastrophic stock market crash, a group of twelve Southern academic writers decided that the time had come for the publication of a militant defense of an agrarian way of life threatened by a materialistic philosophy of industrialism, urbanization and centralization. I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition was the result. Looking at the national, sectional, and local scene with uneasiness and noting with growing horror that the values they regarded as inherent in the agrarian South were being engulfed by a tidal wave of commercialism, industrialism, and materialism, they took their stand. Their "Statement of Principles," which introduced their twelve individual essays, was, they said, "drawn up for the sake of unity." Not only did it represent a credo to which they all subscribed but in many respects it has proved prophetic.

The fears these Nashville Agrarians voiced in 1930 have become the delighted promises and boastings of optimistic Southern Chambers of Commerce writers today. Nashville, a periodical issued for the first time in February, 1957 by the local Chamber of Commerce, depicts what the Agrarians grimly saw developing in 1930: nature industrialized, "transformed into cities and artificial habitations, manufactured into commodities." As the Agrarians foresaw, Nashville embodies "modern advertising along with its twin, personal salesmanship"--"the most significant development of industrialism which has come South." The city which nurtured

most of the Agrarians as students or faculty members of Vanderbilt University, and where one of them continues to teach, now symbolizes, according to the Nashville Chamber of Commerce publicity "dynamic progress amidst an atmosphere of rich heritage and fine tradition."¹ Indeed, the same techniques, the same appeals used in the 1920's and thirties to attract industry to the South are still being exploited--here, advertisers assert, taxes are lower, natural resources are a saleable commodity. Nashville, the "Athens of the South," "city of beauty," is also a "city of forward planning," a city of Progress. It is, one advertisement boasts, a city with a "realistic tax structure, where "rate structures [for natural gas] tailored to specific requirements of individual companies currently hold down the cost of . . . many . . . industrial operations." The slum area around Capitol Hill is being redeveloped, it was proudly announced, as a part of the "Parade of Progress" because public officials, civic leaders, and business men all knew it would pay in terms of a better city, county and state, as well as in dollars in improved adjacent property values and increased business for the area." "This," they believed, "is one of the most important phases of the plan, the creating of desirable commercial property in close proximity to the existing downtown business district."²

"Progress," the Agrarians feared in 1930, would affect the South not only physically but spiritually. Their concern that the Southern way of life might be "stampeded and betrayed out of its own character"--at least as they conceived its character--appears to have been justified: Tennessean Henry Clay Alexander, president of the House of Morgan since 1950, recently noted with approval the disappearance of a distinctive "~~southernness~~" or the "Southern character"--"there is," he stated, "no demarcation between

¹ Nashville, I (February, 1957), 5.

² Ibid., 5 (italics supplied).

life in the North or the South. We all read the same press columns, look at the same television programs, go to the same movies." And, like many other cities of America, Nashville through its Chamber of Commerce self-advertises in boastful quantitative terms: its Life and Casualty Insurance Company building is the "tallest structure in the Southeast"; it is a city "with more electrically heated homes than any other city in America"; "its families use more than three times the national average of family electric consumption," even its baseball team, the Vols, "create tangible profits for merchants, business houses, banks, restaurateurs, hotels, filling stations, public utilities, and food and drink concerns," while it is also its "foremost civic advertiser."¹

It would seem then that the fears of the twelve contributors to I'll Take My Stand were not mere sound and fury. This sort of Chamber of Commerce self-glorification and what it represents can be duplicated today in cities and states throughout the South. In fact, even by 1930, it was all too common from the Agrarians' point of view. Dr. Edwin Mims, for instance, who was chairman of the Department of English at Vanderbilt when John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Robert Penn Warren, and Allen Tate were there as teachers or students, wrote in his Advancing South--Stories of Progress and Reaction (1926) that "liberal leaders are bearing the burden the forward-looking men have always borne. . . . they have the faith of men who are fighting for emancipation from worn-out traditions. They are cheered by the vision of a new age and a finer civilization." "Industrial progress," concluded Mims, "has brought in its wake an increasing number of broadminded men."² Such views were anathema to the Agrarians of I'll Take My Stand.

These Southerners were unmistakably utopians. Insofar as they sought to re-establish (or institute) an ideal

¹ Ibid., pp. 6, 14 (italics supplied).

² (Garden City, New York, 1926), pp. vii-viii.

state, difficult if not impossible to realize, insofar as they were concerned with the social and political structure of a particular type of community, insofar as they presented a way of life appropriate to its own historic time while it represented "a real effort to escape any restraints of both historical time and place" or "of existing institutions and individuals"¹ they may be called utopian; they project an as if (or perhaps an as was) world, although they do not, strictly speaking, present in I'll Take My Stand a fully developed utopia. In one important sense only they do not qualify as utopian: their book offers no imaginative, fictional framework structured upon their assumptions about human nature, society, and the state. Yet, if true utopians are those who seek to create a better society, or whose attention and exposition are directed toward making their society better,² then these twelve Southern Agrarians were utopian in their thinking.

But they were also conservatives. For theirs was a defense of an agrarian, aristocratic society, an attempt to reincarnate a way of life focused on the farmer who was independent and self-sufficient by virtue of his living close to the land. Upon him was to be rebuilt a stable, ordered society, characterized by a rootedness in family, a code of conduct, a love of tradition, a religious faith. The Agrarians' attack on the "American way of life"--which they interpreted to mean a technological, commercial, impersonal society--was both overtly and covertly a defense of what had been the Southern agrarian, aristocratic way of life. In their distrust of human nature, of "progress" which was not "natural," and of unrestrained democracy, they may be described as "conservative." And as Southern writers they produced essays, fiction, poetry, literary criticism, and

¹ Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick, The Quest for Utopia, Anthology for Imaginary Societies (New York, 1952), p. 4.

² Ibid., p. 5.

biography, the characteristic strengths and weaknesses of which become more fully understandable because of their conservatism.

Studying I'll Take My Stand, then, as a utopian conservative document should reveal both the values and inherent deficiencies not only in the work itself but in the defensive, entrenched position these twelve men of letters took in the face of a rapidly industrializing South.

I'll Take My Stand was only one of more than a score of works¹ appearing in the decade and a half from the mid-twenties which sought to explain, to defend and sometimes to justify the "Southern" way of life. Focusing on it rather than on any other of the several distinguished works with the same general theme poses certain questions which, through the course of this study, will be partially if not fully answered: (1) What is distinctive about this symposium? (2) How might it most profitably be studied? (3) Once its origins, its evolution, its distinctive characteristics and thesis, its major strengths and

¹Merely to list titles from 1925 to 1940 of works concerned with aspects of Southern culture--economic, sociological, political, literary--would suggest that I'll Take My Stand was no lone voice crying out to a disinterested audience. From a consideration of such works as Edwin Mims' study of "progress" in the South, through numerous studies of Southern economic conditions in the late nineteen-twenties and mid-thirties (U. B. Phillips' Life and Labor in the Old South, Rupert Vance's Human Factors in Cotton Culture, A. Bergland and others' Labor in the Industrial South, Broadus and G. S. Mitchell's Industrial Revolution in the South, etc.) to Virginus Dabney's Liberalism in the South, Clarence Cason's 90° in the Shade, and such monumental sociological studies as Howard Odum's Southern Regions of the United States, Rupert Vance's Human Geography of the South, or John Dollard's Caste and Class in a Southern Town, it becomes apparent that this distinctive region of the United States was becoming an area for investigation, attack, and defense comparable to that accorded the Western frontier more than a quarter of a century before.

weaknesses are ferreted out, what value does this information have for an understanding of the works of the individual contributors, the way of life of an area, or a philosophical position? Does this knowledge suggest any standards by which works of the individual contributors to the symposium can be evaluated?

CHAPTER II

THE GROUP

Identification

The contributors to I'll Take My Stand were once described as "lazy literary cavaliers who refused to see any vestige of loan sharks or pellagra in the jessamine-scented moonlight."¹ Such a characterization of the Agrarians who have since 1930 been recognized as important influences in the literary world warrants some examination. Yet, if the aim of this study were merely to establish or deny the validity of a negative description, a detailed examination of this collection of essays would be unnecessary. There are, however, other justifications for such a study. First, the authors have distinguished themselves as writers, editors, critics, and teachers.² Second, theirs was truly a "group" attitude rather than a casual collection of views expressed by men who were Southerners. Third, they continued not only to expound their views as a group but also to implement them, to attempt to persuade others to their position by public debates, by living according to their principles (some of them returned to the land for a time) and by continuing to propagandize for the cause with frequent publication in a score of periodicals.

Several contributors to the symposium have become writers of national reputation--eight may be described as men of letters--poets, novelists, critics, biographers, essayists,

¹Jonathan Daniels, Saturday Review of Literature, XII (July 6, 1935), 14.

²For individual, more complete biographical accounts, see below, Appendix B.

and editors; three are social scientists; and one was a journalist.

The "literary" character attributed to the Agrarian movement is the result of the fact that most of the group, even by 1930, were already well known as creative writers or critics: Tate, Davidson, Ransom, and Warren had been Fugitive poets and editors; Fletcher, a cosmopolitan, Southern expatriate, friend of Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell, was an Imagist poet; Stark Young, a novelist and sensitive drama critic; John Wade, biographer and an editor of the Dictionary of American Biography. Thereafter all acquired new lustre--as editors of various influential literary journals¹ which served as organs for "new criticism" or for expression of regional character (Warren, Ransom, Tate, Lytle, and Wade); as novelists (Warren, Young, Lytle); as poets (Fletcher, Davidson, Ransom, Tate, and Warren²); as a translator (Young's renditions of Chekov have been consistently used in off-Broadway productions); as literary critics (Warren, Ransom, Tate, Davidson, Lytle, and Wade).

But the Agrarian movement included more than the world of letters. Although few discussions of I'll Take My Stand have done little more than to list as "also belonging" to the Agrarians the names of Frank Owsley, Herman Clarence Nixon, Lyle Lanier, and Henry Blue Kline, the careers, influence, and contributions of these social scientists are considerably greater than the usual casual dismissal would suggest. The late Frank Owsley, one most concerned with implementing the theories of the Agrarians, was recognized as an authority on Southern social, economic, and diplomatic history, particularly

¹After The Fugitive, as editors they helped to determine policy for The Southern Review, The Kenyon Review, Sewanee Review, and The Georgia Review.

²Fletcher was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his poetry in 1938; both Ransom and Tate have received the Bollingen Prize, Ransom in 1951, Tate in 1956; Warren's most recent book of poems, Promises, was recognized in May, 1958, with the National Book Award.

for the period of the War between the States; Nixon has contributed several studies in political and economic-social history; Lanier, former editor of the Psychological Bulletin, has taught in Southern, Eastern, and Midwestern institutions, has served as chairman of departments of psychology, recently was made Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Science at the University of Illinois, and is noted for his research in physiological psychology and in the comparative abilities of whites and Negroes; the late Henry Blue Kline held various government posts in the T.V.A. and the A.E.C. and was an editorial writer on the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

That the Twelve Southerners were engaged in similar academic careers or in the practice of literature is of little significance in itself. More important is the fact that ten of them were directly associated at Vanderbilt University, either as students or teachers, for the same period in the nineteen-twenties. Six had been students in that decade--Tate, Davidson, Lanier, Warren, Lytle, and Kline¹; six had been teaching--Ransom, Davidson, Wade, Owsley, Nixon, and Lanier. The association evolving among the group by 1930 (only two, Young and Fletcher, were "outsiders") was more than a student activity encouraged by the patronizing interest of a few faculty members; it was, rather, a rare combination of minds whose interests and convictions permitted no lines of separation based on rank or position.

Personal and Sectional Heritage

But the "group-mindedness" was induced by more than the accident of academic proximity. All of the twelve were Southerners by birth (five name Tennessee as their native state), and only one (Henry Blue Kline) was exposed to an

¹All six were graduated from Vanderbilt; Tate, B. A., 1922, magna cum laude; Davidson, M. A., 1923; Lanier, B. A., 1923; Warren, B. A., summa cum laude, 1925; Lytle, B. A., 1925; Kline, B. A., M. A., 1928, 1929.

early non-Southern education. More significantly, the education for most of them was of a particular kind--reading at home, private tutors, academies with emphasis on classical training--usually not a rural public school instruction. It was the kind of representatively Southern education described by John Crowe Ransom as "classical and humanistic learning not highly scientific and not wildly scattered about over a variety of special studies."¹ Ransom was fortunate in his early education: he was taught at home by his parents--his father was a Methodist missionary, linguist, and theologian; his mother, formerly a school teacher; at the age of eleven, John Ransom was sent to the Bowen School in Nashville where he learned Latin and Greek and heard lively learned conversations on the classics.² Other Agrarians enjoyed a similar education. John Gould Fletcher, for example, wrote of his early schooling: "My boyhood was that of almost any young Southern boy of the time, except for the fact that my parents, being well-to-do, I was given good teachers and the use of a large library. At the age of about seven, I started studying Latin and German under private tutors, and I did not go to school till I was ten."³ Donald Davidson was a student at Branham and Hughes School (1905-1909) at Spring Hill in Tennessee where his rigorous training in the classics and mathematics made Vanderbilt seem easy by comparison. Tate received his early education at home, then entered Cross School, a private "classical academy" in Louisville. Owsley's earliest education was in a private school taught by a relative on the estate of his mother's family, the McGehees. Kline was sent to Massey Military School in Pulaski, Tennessee (Ransom's birthplace), before he entered a high school in Rochester,

¹"The South Defends Its Heritage," Harper's Magazine, CLIX (June, 1929), 112.

²Louise Cowan, The Fugitive Group: A Literary History (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1959), pp. 8-9.

³Twentieth Century Authors, ed. by Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (New York, 1942), pp. 350-351.

New York, Stark Young's early education was at a seminary. Of his more advanced study at the University of Mississippi, which he entered at the age of fifteen, he wrote: "At that time the education at the University of Mississippi followed the tradition of the Old South; it must in fact have presented some of the last vestiges of that tradition. The tradition was out of England, suited essentially to a ruling class; its accent . . . was on the humanities, that is to say, the classical in style long since revamped, plus a great respect for legal studies."¹ Only three of the group, Nixon, Lanier, and Cwsley, all social scientists, experienced a significantly different pattern of education of a rural one-room-school-house type. Owsley "attended several different country schools where he was allowed to advance as rapidly as he wished."²

Thus, a love of knowledge and an interest in a humanistic education were fostered, whether the early training was in a private or public institution. Later educational experiences strengthened such a preference and taste. Lanier, for instance, recalls that his year at Valparaiso University where he studied French, mathematics and chemistry to qualify for entrance to Vanderbilt, gave him so good a foundation that he continued his study of Latin and French, and added German and Greek, while he transferred from a major in English literature to philosophy.³ Both Owsley and Wade attended city schools for a time, Cwsley in Montgomery, Alabama, and Wade in Marshallville, Georgia. Of his schooling, Wade wrote, "I went to school at the Public (Segregated!) School. . . . There was a bit of Latin, a bit of Mathematics,

¹ Stark Young, The Pavilion; of People and Times Remembered, of Stories and Places (New York, 1951), p. 125.

² Harriet C. Cwsley (Mrs. Frank Owsley), letter to Virginia Rock, June 30, 1958.

³ Interview, September 27, 1957.

no Greek."¹ Warren attended the public schools in Guthrie, Tennessee, until he was fifteen, after which he went to Clarksville High School for a year. But to infer a direct cause-effect relationship from the education of the group, or to assume their appreciation for the humanities and languages prompted their joint activity is not only to oversimplify a complex phenomenon but also to distort the importance of just one of several factors. The community of experience and attitude about the purpose of education--which may be described as achieving and preserving "character, personality, gentlemanliness in order to make . . . living an art," an ideal more readily achieved with a training "classical and humanistic, rather than scientific and technical"²--is of course significant. But there are other aspects of the problem.

Although one might label as "accidental" the fact that all twelve of the Agrarians had been born in the South, the similarity of their feelings about their family and its history, their identification with a particular environment, their love of the South and its culture can not be explained as coincidence. For instance, one of the most striking unanimities in attitude is an affirmation of the importance of family and kin, an identification often closely enmeshed with a sense of belonging not only to a certain locale but to a particular kind of locale--a rural, agrarian environment characterized by open fields and woods and by growing crops on small farms, where the "hastening ills" of a mechanizing civilization had not yet destroyed the "natural" beauty. So this "sense of family," which one may find reflected in many of their novels, poems, personal letters, and essays,³ is

¹Letter to Virginia Rock, July 17, 1958.

²John Gould Fletcher, "Education, Past and Present," I'll Take My Stand (New York, 1930), pp. 103, 120.

³For a reflection of this characteristic in the works of the Agrarians, see, for instance, Stark Young's novels,

represented by Stark Young in his autobiography where he describes his own feeling about kin:

It is a trait that is very Southern and that is hard to explain to people who are not in the way of it. They are apt to regard it as bragging, ancestor worship, tiresome old tales. It can, of course, be any of these, but not necessarily. To anyone who grew up as I did it seems the most natural thing in the world to listen to stories and names of your own kin or the kin of others; and a memory for such things becomes almost a second nature. It is not necessarily a form of boasting, for to us a black sheep may be as interesting to remember as a general in the family.¹

"By the time I was seven," Young recalls, "I felt myself one of a large clan who loved me."² This cohesive force of family affection and obligation--one of several threads tying these Southern agrarians with an allegiance to the past--imbued them with a sense of security and continuity, against which they considered manifestations and expressions of dissociation and radical change. Donald Davidson, writing to Allen Tate from the pleasant rural environment of Vermont, the first summer he taught at the Breadloaf School of English, observed:

Here, I have just finished Shelley, who had fine doctrines that he took occasion to set forth; but he was always driven, at last to thinking about himself and to writing about himself. It was inevitable with him, and it is just as inevitable with us--the world being arranged as it is. But there's this difference in the South, or should be; we have a not altogether dislocated society to fall back on, we have family and friends--. . . .

[July 29, 1931]

particularly So Red the Rose, River House, and The Torches Flare (Young was once characterized as a novelist expounding "a genealogical interpretation of Southern leadership" [Robert A. Lively, Fiction Fights the Civil War, An Unfinished Chapter in the Literary History of the American People (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1957), p. 170]; Allen Tate's only novel, The Fathers, and several poems, including "Records," and "The Oath"; Andrew Lytle's The Long Night, the theme of which is built around a Southern family's vendetta during the Civil War; John Crowe Ransom's "Dead Boy"; Nixon's Possum Trot and Lower Piedmont Country; Davidson's "The Tall Men."

¹ The Pavilion, pp. 77-78.

² "Cousin Micajah," Feliciana (New York, 1935), p. 5.

Nor does this view appear only in the writing of the Agrarians. The importance and relationship of the family to its individual members and to the land were representatively described by a biographer of a North Carolina family whose history depicted microcosmically the South's transition from an agrarian to urban-industrial character:

. . . The South, achieving most decisively of all the regions the set patterns and maturity of rural, agricultural societies, provided a congenial context for family continuity. . . . A family affirms not only itself, but the place and time in which it lives and has its being--friends, community, and cultural values. Here, then, the family has not been swept away in the ceaseless change of the larger society.¹

Certainly it is not difficult to understand how a sense of belonging can be extended from kin to land. That these Agrarians experienced such an identification hardly needs proof, although the emotional nature of their identification deserves some comment. For some of them the identification with the land was almost a mystique. It had the character of a religious experience and was as basic to their being. In this spirit, H. C. Nixon, in his biography of his own native Alabama habitat, includes a bit of verse he once sent as a young county correspondent to the Daily Hot Blast of nearby Anniston:

The Woodland Hills of Old Calhoun

I love their cool and pleasant shades
Beside the sparkling streams,
Where I may rest on soft green moss
And soar in velvet dreams,
Delighted with sweet melody
That's pure and unrestrained and free.
Though I may travel far and wide,
Though I may sail the sea,
The woodland hills of old Calhoun
Will e'er be dear to me,
As dear as any place on earth,²
And dearer as my place of birth.

¹George Lee Simpson, Jr., The Cokers of Carolina, A Social Biography of a Family (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1956), p. 307.

²Lower Piedmont Country (New York, 1946), pp. xiii-xiv.

Similarly, the vividness with which Davidson pictures the beauty of Southern fields in his "Geography of the Brain" suggests the intensity of his attachment:

O'er the Southern fields green corn is waving
Husky and broad of blade. The ranks of corn
Push from the stable earth. The pollen falls,
A yellow life from shaken tassels, piercing
The seed below. Pollen falls in my heart,
A dust of song that sprinkles fruitfulness,
Mellowing like the corn in Southern fields.¹

In a letter to Allen Tate written in the fall of 1929, Davidson revealed that his love of nature was no poet's mask: "Nashville is smoky as ever, but autumn in Tennessee is still wonderful. My wife, Mary, and I spent almost the entire Sunday at Glendale reading and studying quietly in the open air and looking at trees and animals. . . ." ² Warren, with less transport and a more involved poetic restraint, shows the same sensitivity to the beauties of a Kentucky fall in "Croesus in Autumn":

If the distraught verdure cleave not to the branch
Less powerfully than flesh to the fervent bone,
Should then gruff Croesus on the village bench
Lament the absolute gold of summer gone?

Though this gray guy be no Aurelius
Surveying the ilex and the Latin vine,
He might consider a little piteous
The green and fatal tribe's decline.

But in Kentucky against a dwindling sun
The riven red oak and the thick sweet gum
Yet hold the northward hills whose final stone
In the dark ogive supports the fractured loam.

The seasons down our country have a way
To stir the bold and metaphysic skull,
Fuddling the stout cortex so mortally
That it cries no more, Proud heart be still, be still.

I bring you but this broken metaphor,
So haul your careful carcass home, old fellow,

¹The Tall Men (Boston, 1927), p. 30.

²October 26, 1929.

More Roman than the doddering emperor
Now green is blown and every gold gone sallow.¹

Stark Young's nostalgia for his beloved Mississippi is reflected through the central character of one of his novels:

The still, passionate night hung over everything. The smell of the roses and jasmine and heliotrope and box, sweet, heavy, remote, filled the warm night air, and mingled with its drenched surprise of freshness like early dew; and farther away, along the river, came the perfume of the honeysuckle fences. He remembered all over again how beautiful the world could be, and that he loved this, his own country, best of all.²

The source of this sensibility Young describes more empirically in his discussion of "provincialism." "It is a fine trait," he declared, "analogous to one's interest in his own center, which is the most deeply rooted consideration he has, the source of his direction, health and soul."³

For many of the Agrarians this sense of communion with a locale was both intensified and expanded by various farming experiences. The agrarian philosophy which they avowed--"that the culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations, and that therefore it should have the economic preference"--did not deserve such dismissal as John A. Rice gave it when he charged that "the only plowing they ever did was in the classroom."⁴

Without exception [said Donald Davidson in reply] they stem from rural backgrounds. Probably there is not a rural task common to the South in which this or that person of the band has not at one time or another engaged--whether plowing, planting, milking, feeding, or castration of hogs and cattle. And what they have not

¹The Literary Digest, XCV (November 19, 1927), 34.

²River House (New York, 1929), p. 229.

³"Admonition to the Focahontases," The New Republic, LXIII (July 9, 1930), 208.

⁴I Came Out of the Eighteenth Century quoted by Donald Davidson in "The 'Mystery' of the Agrarians, Facts and Illusions About Some Southern Writers," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVI (January 23, 1943), 6.

engaged in they have bossed. At the time when I'll Take My Stand was published . . . a number of the group were landholders endeavoring to supplement through crops and cattle the meagre stipend which the industrial order grudgingly permitted them to draw as poets and professors.¹

In his reply to charges of the Agrarians' dilettantism in agriculture, Davidson implied a greater extensiveness of their practical experience than was the case for some of them. But it is true that several of the Agrarians grew up in rural areas or actually did work on or manage farms--Davidson himself, for instance, lived in a small agricultural community as a youth and worked in a hayfield of a fine Tennessee farm. Perhaps it was this experience which led him as a poet to ask:

Have you worked with your hands? Have you tossed
the pungent clover
High with sun-cured stalks into bottomless wagons?²

Warren recalls that he spent the summers of his boyhood in the country of Southern Kentucky and Tennessee.³ H. C. Nixon in the autobiographical preface to Lower Piedmont Country writes of "plowing, hoeing, or picking cotton, especially at times of the day or week when trade was light at the store [his father ran a country store in rural Alabama]. Sometimes I had to cut sprouts or pile brush in a 'newground.'"⁴ It was his agrarian community, Possum Trot, he wrote, which

. . . has most influenced me to become contemplative and reflective. At Possum Trot and only at Possum Trot have I written poetry and verse . . . of oaks and pines, of dreams, of rural hills, of local scenes,
where lazy trees nod gently in the breeze
I meditated, sometimes behind plow handles, upon what I had learned from the lips of the historians . . .⁵

Lyle Lanier lived and worked on a Tennessee farm until he was

¹ Idem.

² "Geography of the Brain," p. 32.

³ Twentieth Century Authors, p. 1477.

⁴ Lower Piedmont Country, p. xvii.

⁵ Possum Trot, Rural Community South (Norman, Oklahoma, 1941), p. 5.

sixteen; and Andrew Lytle, speaking of his acquaintance with farming as a way of life, wrote:

My family since before the American Revolution have been farmers, large and small. . . . I have been involved with farming, off and on, since my adolescence, although I am an artist and no proper farmer. Cornsilk, a large cotton farm belonging to my father, and which I ran a year before I went to Yale, was the place I most loved.¹

And during the planning and writing of the Agrarian symposium, Lytle lived near Portland, Tennessee, where he wrote and raised tobacco on a rented farm. The Tates, who returned from France in January, 1930, moved to Benfolly, a three-hundred acre farm (a gift from Tate's brother Ben), near Clarkesville, Tennessee, and through most of the 1930's they supervised its operation by a tenant family.

Expression of this mystique of the land is not confined to the Agrarians. Mid-Westerer Sherwood Anderson, who had moved to Virginia in the late 'twenties, gave voice to this same sense of identification with the land; any one of the Agrarians might have written Anderson's meditation:

You could burn pieces of paper and they were gone.
The land remained. The trees, the grass, the flowing
brown water of the river remained.
Burn the trees and they would grow again.
The land was there before man came. It would be there
when there were no men left.
But there were certain people, the poor whites of the
South, the Negroes, slaves and free, farmers . . .
who worked their own fields, who were related to
the land.
There had been a marriage, man and the land.

The thought set down here, coming to me as it did in a certain house in the South on a certain night, was no doubt not a new thought in the world but such thoughts mean nothing to a man when set down in books, when expounded by some speaker, some political revolutionist. . . . [The thought] explained so much of the South-- . . .²

In 1930 the South was still largely agrarian, both in economy

¹Letter to Virginia Rock, September 5, 1957.

²Sherwood Anderson, Memoirs (New York, 1942), p. 323.

and in culture. For the Agrarians the emotional attachment to the land and to an agrarian way of life was at the same time an attachment to the South. The two were inseparable.

It may seem quite unnecessary to mention that all of the Twelve shared a sense of allegiance to their region. But it is this allegiance which helps to explain the cohesiveness of the group. The first and most enduring point of agreement, wrote Davidson in his history of I'll Take My Stand, was a natural loyalty to the South which "had both combative and sentimental aspects"¹ and which was rooted in both the history of their families and the history of the South itself. Simply to label ideas and experiences as "Southern" was important. John Donald Wade, in discussing Southern humor, observed:

. . . the word southern has long had its importance in my consciousness. Has it a meaning, really other than the geographic one? It has been fashionable to think so for many years, and if the legend which in the beginning ascribed it meaning was at first legend merely, it is not likely by now legend merely, any more. . . . So in my mind there is a body of notions that hold their hands up and answer present when one says southern. . . .²

To the Agrarians the traumatic experience of the Civil War, the humiliations of Reconstruction, and the effects on Southern economy were not mere abstractions in history textbooks; they were part of the lives of their own people--of their ancestors and their ancestors' neighbors. Experiences as well as immediate and transmitted emotional reactions were embedded in the poetry and stories written by Tate, Young and Davidson; they constituted the personal heritage of proud, sensitive, and articulate men who were moved to protest when they saw threatened once again, the values and a way of life they believed should survive. Allen Tate, in the moving ending of his novel, The Fathers, incorporates a scene set in

¹"I'll Take My Stand: A History," The American Review, V (Summer, 1935), 309.

²"Southern Humor," Culture in the South, ed. by W. T. Couch (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1934), p. 617..

the country of his family tradition, and he himself suggests that he has used his family history in his writings: "As far back as I can remember I was wondering why the people and families I knew--my own family particularly--had got to be what they were, and what their experience had been. This problem, greatly extended, continues to absorb all my study and speculation, and is the substance of my novel, The Fathers."¹ Such an interest in his heritage was well nourished in his boyhood, when up to World War I he was taken every summer to Washington and Fairfax County (his mother's childhood home) to visit the stone foundations and ruined chimneys of Pleasant Hill, the family "place" which had been burned by General Blenker's "Dutch" Brigade in the Union advance to First Manassas.² The very restraint with which the reaction of young Lacy Buchan to the burning of his family home and the suicide of his father is described suggests how deeply such Civil War experiences were embedded in the consciousness of a proud people (the story is told by the son, Lacy):

We drew up at the end of the garden and dismounted, and gazed at the single chimney, from which protruded, like a stiff arm, the charred end of a beam. The smoke lifted weakly from the black embers into the still sunlight. There was nobody there.³

And in the manner of a Greek tragedy, the death of Major Buchan is related by a minor character rather than enacted for the reader by the central figures:

"The Yankee officer give 'em half an hour to get out. . . . When the officer says I'll give you half an hour, the major looked at him. You know how the major is. . . . The major looked at him. He held himself up and . . . you know how he is when he don't like folks. Polite. That's what he was. He was polite to that Yankee. He come down to the bottom step and said, 'There is nothing that you can give to me, sir,' and walked back into the house.

.

¹ Twentieth Century Authors, p. 1386.

² Cowan, p. 36.

³ The Fathers (New York, 1938), p. 303.

"When he didn't come out after half an hour, the officer waited a while and went up and knocked at the door. He went in with some of his men and they brought the major out and laid him on the grass. . . . Hyar's the rope. . . ."¹

Finally, Lacy's last look at the ruins of his heritage suggests the intensity of the emotional experience still evoked in a fictional creation:

There was a yellow glow coming over my shoulder from the west into his face. I looked away to the tall chimney, now a gently shaking blur, and down to the dark cedars. I looked again into his face and saw that the eyes were half-closed, but the head was thrown back, and he was looking at me.²

Mississippi-born Stark Young, too, reflects in his novels and essays attitudes and reactions which stem from family experiences. Particularly in So Red the Rose he evokes the sense of loss felt by two ante-bellum Mississippi slave-holding aristocratic families who came out of the war with little more than their land. The central character of The Torches Flare, observes, "It's only natural, of course, that a people who had lost their cause and had a hard time afterward and were so poor and had their pride hurt so, and saw a thing they had been born to dying away from them in a new age, should have created a defense in some sort of beautiful tradition."³ Such a defense was motivated and fashioned in part from the experiences of his own family and in part from accounts of the losses suffered by other Southerners. In his autobiography, The Pavilion, Young writes:

Ours, when I was growing up, was a country peopled with ghosts, warm, close, and human; the dead were often as present as the living. Naked chimneys of burnt houses; ruined cemeteries where the dead had sometimes been kicked out of their graves and left lying under the sky overhead; tombstones thrown down, smashed door panels and ripped-up portraits, with often a wretched, proud poverty, were familiar to everyone. I never heard them spoken of

¹ Ibid., p. 305.

² Ibid., p. 306.

³ (New York, 1928), p. 274.

save as aspects of war as war is. As for my own people--proud spirits whom history had slapped in the face, no doubt this changed world exaggerated some of their faults and pushed some of their virtues into defects. But I have always chosen to think there was a certain elevation in many older people. I knew then that came from suffering and loss, sorrow and humiliation, along with a sense of what had gone before, most of all a way of life now gone forever. . . . How much in the midst of a shifting world, more industrial, more restless, and more confused in its aims and standards, how much of that way of life was gone forever, I am not sure they knew; but they felt the sting and blunt edge of the loss of something they had lived by and within which they had thought and had tried to honor themselves. Nearly all of us were poor together.¹

In the same work, the treatment of his aunt and uncle by a Negro regiment commanded by white officers figures prominently in one of his novels, and is described by Young in his autobiography:

They knocked my uncle down, hit my aunt over the head with the flat of the sword, gave the family twenty-five minutes to get out of the house, then burnt it. I have a long account my aunt wrote of it a month afterwards, which, a good deal toned down, to avoid too strong an emphasis in the story's design as a whole, I used in my novel, So Red the Rose.²

Yet something of the emotional intensity of his aunt and uncle's experience must have been felt vicariously by Young, enabling him to describe it vividly in the novel:

"Get out," Agnes ordered. "Get out of my house. Get out of my sight!"

A big black who seemed to be in command gave a guffaw, and the other negroes, watching him evidently, followed. One of them came up to her and with his open hand boxed her on the cheek. At once another negro put a pistol against her breast; she could smell his sweat. Then the big negro who had struck her said, "Don't shoot her, Mose, slap her. Slap the old slut." He broke into a stream of abuse.

.
There was one white man. He was sitting on a horse, between the smokehouse and the columns of the gallery. Agnes called to him, but either in the din he did not hear or he pretended not to. She sent the little mulatto

¹ Pp. 60-61.

² Ibid., pp. 65-66.

girl, Bessie, . . . to the officer, "if the gentleman would permit her to speak to him."

. . . "I ask your authority to protect us from these drunken negroes," she said.

He hardly heard her through. "Hear that, boys? Drunk niggers! Drunk niggers, you shan't talk so to me! There ain't a drunk nigger here--not one of these men has had a drink of whiskey in a month. . . .

. . . "Damned old scoundrel, what did you shut that door against us for," a soldier shouted as the door opened and Hugh McGehee appeared. Blows from a cavalry pistol and a sabre struck his head. As Agnes put herself between her husband and the negroes, a pistol was held against her temple and they began to curse her. A negro drew his sabre and slashed the air, threatening to cut her throat; but seeing her looking him in the eyes, stopped slashing about, and then all of a sudden brought it down, though flat, upon her head. She staggered back to the gallery.

. . . the officer said they were only losing time. If the family was not out in twenty minutes the house would be burned over their heads.

The destruction had already begun. The table in the dining-room, which had been laid for breakfast, was overturned and smashed for kindling a fire in the middle of the floor. The china closet was crashed up. They could hear axes smashing over the house, splitting up banisters and furniture for the fire. The pictures on the walls were being slashed or cut down. When he came to Henry Clay's portrait a negro corporal, for some reason, shouted a new volley of filth, as he lunged for the face. In the meantime other negro soldiers were pouring turpentine over the library and a sheet of flame spread there. Before the flame was lighted, Hugh could see the officer with the ancient recipe book in his hand, which he had picked up from the table. He would scan a page, then tear it and crumple the paper in his hand, scan another page and do the same thing; and then as the flames began in one corner of the room, he hurled the book into them. More than any of the rest this angered Hugh; his wife laid her hand on his arm.

. . . Not long after, flames poured from windows, and down the long hall a torrent of smoke and flame rushed out through the door. Timbers crashed and then the roof fell in. The columns of the front portico remained standing.¹

¹ So Red the Rose (New York, 1936), pp. 321-326.

The truth of history, Stark Young once wrote, is "a combination of actuality and remoteness."¹

For Davidson, too, his family history was not so far removed as to leave him untouched by Yankee invasions, whether they came in the form of armies or machines. In a lecture given recently at Bowdoin College on the spread of the Old and New South myths, Davidson observed:

It was the speechmakers, above all, who devised the rose-tinted stereoscopic spectacles through which the whole country gazed for a time in fascination at an Old South that never was. The rose-tinted spectacles became a habit. . . .

But the South knew all the time that those spectacles were tinted. The old folks of my childhood had precious few evenings to sit in the moonlight and listen to banjos. But now and then they did find time to pass on some information to us young folks. A good deal of it was rather grim. Nothing Henry Grady or Bob Taylor said could ever fool my grandmother who in the Sixties had seen her boy-friends captured by marauding Federal soldiers and shot in cold blood on the main street of her home town. Her view of reconciliation of the Gray with the Blue was about like that of some French villagers that I talked to, near the Western Front, soon after the armistice of November 11, 1918. Those French people wagged their heads skeptically and said: "Les Boches, ils reviendront!"²

In the Civil War section of his long poem, The Tall Men, Davidson recounts this episode. His grandmother, Rebecca Patten Wells, had seen a Federal captain and his men shoot three Confederate soldiers who had slipped home for a meal and a change of clothes. Davidson's ending of the scene suggests again how personal experiences came to be woven into a literary web of a sectional allegiance:

Roughly the guard, with carbines, dragged them on,
While the captain in Federal blue lounged on his horse
And sucked his moustaches. They took the three young men,
Lined them up in the middle of the town and shot them.

¹Quoted by John Arthos in Shenandoah, V (1954), 24.

²"The New South and the Conservative Tradition," lecture given April 16, 1958, at the Biennial Institute of Bowdoin College, unpublished manuscript, pp. 20-21. Quoted by permission of the author.

Shot them dead right there, those three young fellows,
 Just boys, you know, all Chapel Hill boys.
 One tried to run. He got across a garden
 And over a paling-fence before they stopped him. . .
 Full of bullet-holes . . . riddled. . . . The bodies
 Lay in three pools of blood until the women
 And old men carried them in by candle-light . . .
 Dressed them decent . . . buried them,
 Riddled . . . the blood lay in pools.

John Wade notes that even though there was no actual fighting in the neighborhood of his family (Marshallville, Georgia), so that he "grew up with fewer tangible memories of the War than did Donald Davidson in Middle Tennessee, I knew how Uncle This or Cousin That was wounded at Seven Pines--and so on. . . . As for the Legend, it was of course as omnipresent and as omnipotent here by the time of my childhood as it was anywhere else."²

Early in 1931 Davidson had written to William S. Knickerbocker, then editor of The Sewanee Review, "whenever . . . [my people] have touched the modern industrial system and all its commercial expression, they have suffered ruin, impoverishment, disaster, wreckage of body if not of spirit. . . . I really cannot be at ease in Zion, or be other than rebellious remembering all these things."³ A few weeks later in a letter to Allen Tate he made more explicit the relationship between his heritage and his own reactions to what was happening in the South:

. . . My people were nearly all farmers, some of them fairly substantial ones--but hardly plantation owners. A few of them were professional people, doctors, etc. What I said about their ruination is all true. The war ruined them, and since then industrialism, directly or indirectly, has finished the job.

[April 14, 1931]

Where the personal histories of the families of the Agrarians

¹"The Sod of Battle-Fields," The Tall Men, p. 24.

²Letter to Virginia Rock, July 17, 1958.

³MS letter in the files of Donald Davidson, March 31, 1931.

are available, they would seem to support the explanation of W. J. Cash of how the essential Southern mind and will through the Civil War and Reconstruction had managed to survive the smashing of the ante-bellum Southern world. Cash, who was speaking of the post-Civil War generation, might have been describing the reactions of the Agrarians themselves in the 1930's:

. . . four years of fighting for the preservation of their world and their heritage, . . . had left these Southerners far more self-conscious than they had been before, far more aware of their differences and of the line which divided what was Southern from what was not. And upon that line all their intensified patriotism and love, all their high pride in the knowledge that they had fought the good fight and had yielded only to irresistible force, was concentrated, to issue in a determination, immensely more potent than in the past, to hold fast to their own, to maintain their divergences, to remain what they had been and were.¹

A sectional heritage was not the only bond among the twelve. They also shared points of view which in their peculiar interdependence were "Southern" in character. These attitudes were essential elements of "Uncle Sam's other province," to use Allen Tate's characterization of the South; albeit American, they were at the same time, regional qualities and distinctive in their totality from those of other regions. More than a year before the symposium was published, John Crowe Ransom defensively characterized the provincial Southerner. The portrait has a likeness to the Agrarian group which was soon to coalesce:

It is out of fashion these days to look backward rather than forward; and about the only American given commonly to this disgraceful conduct is some unreconstructed Southerner, who persists in his regard for a certain terrain, a certain history, and a certain inherited way of living. He feels himself in the American scene as an anachronism, and knows he is felt by his neighbors as a reproach [a tolerably harmless reproach].²

¹The Mind of the South (New York, 1954), pp. 114-115.

²"The South Defends Its Heritage," 108.

These elements of the Southern world are manifested, says Cash, in two ways: "A fairly definite mental pattern, associated with a fairly definite social pattern--a complex of established relationships and habits of thought, sentiments, prejudices, standards and values, and associations of ideas."¹ And it was in the consistently defensive-offensive position of the group, a Southern position revealed from 1926 to 1930 in their letters as well as in their articles and books, that one finds their common patterns of thought, their sentiments and prejudices, their standards and values.

The Fugitive Experience

The markedly aesthetic character of their Agrarian movement is attributable in part to an earlier group activity that resulted in the publication of The Fugitive² from 1922 to 1925. The Agrarian and Fugitive groups are in fact frequently confused and it is sometimes assumed that the personnel of the two was the same. That the Fugitive movement explains in part the formation and cohesiveness of the Agrarians is undeniable, but the two activities, in spite of certain

¹ The Mind of the South, p. [12], unnumbered.

² In all, nineteen issues appeared. The magazine began as a quarterly in April 1922; in 1923 there were five issues, in 1924 six and in 1925 four, the last appearing in December.

For a comprehensive study of both the magazine and the group who made it, see Louise Cowan, The Fugitive Group: A Literary History (published in 1959 by the Louisiana State University Press) which is based extensively on hitherto unpublished material. Donald Davidson's recently published Mercer Lectures, Southern Writers in the Modern World (Athens, Georgia, 1958), contain an excellent account of the Fugitive group, its genesis and importance (see "The Thankless Muse and Her Fugitive Poets," pp. 1-30. This lecture was also published in the Spring 1958 issue of the Sewanee Review). Other accounts of the later careers of the central figures include John Bradbury's The Fugitives: A Critical Account (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1958); Lee F. Gerlach's "The Poetry and Strategies of Allen Tate" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1955), especially pp. 75-91; John Stewart's "The Fugitive-Agrarian Writers: A History and a Criticism" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1948).

common aspects, were significantly different in their purposes, their members, and their character.

Developing out of a series of informal critical discussions¹ held at the apartment of Sidney Mtttron Hirsch,² the Fugitive group in its first public pronouncement declared that its intention was to escape from a narrow provincial Southernism:

Official exception having been taken by the sovereign people of the mint julep, a literary phrase known rather euphemistically as Southern Literature has expired, like any other stream whose source is stopped up. The demise was not untimely: among other advantages, The Fugitive is enabled to come to birth in Nashville, Tennessee, under a star not entirely unsympathetic. The Fugitive flees from nothing faster than from the high-caste Brahmins of the Old South.³

Donald Davidson, commenting some years later on this foreword because it was "sometimes . . . misconstrued as a repudiation of the South" explained that they were talking about a pretentious sentimentalism, the "poet-laureating, the cheapness and triviality of public taste even among those supposed to be cultured; the lack of serious devotion to literature,

¹The gathering of some dozen men which began on alternate Saturday evenings in the spring of 1921 might be considered a sort of literary club. And like such clubs of Eighteenth Century London, this informal group discussed philosophy, aesthetics, the state of letters in Southern society, and more important for the future of literature in the United States, their own poetry. Even Edwin Mims, chairman of the Department of English who was at first disparaging of the group's plans to publish their own magazine, later pointed out that these informal meetings at which copies of the poems were distributed for criticism, "became increasingly beneficial to all the members of the group; there was real criticism from men who had high standards of literary taste" (The Advancing South, p. 199).

²Tate described him as "a mystic and I think a Rosicrucian" and attributed to him the naming of their magazine ("The Fugitive, 1922-1925," Princeton University Library Chronicle, III (April, 1942), 79.

³"Foreword," The Fugitive, I (April, 1922).

to the arts, to ideas."¹ Other Southern authors had a similar reaction. Ellen Glasgow, noting a lack of interest in literature in the South and an unfortunate taste for the sentimental from the 1890's on, might have been speaking for the Fugitives in 1922:

Our innocence may have been as real as our gentility; but our sentimentality was so close to the skin that it would drip if it were touched. Years later, when an interviewer asked me what I thought the South needed most, I replied instantly, "Blood and irony."

. . . in the South there was not only adolescence to outgrow, there was an insidious sentimental tradition to live down. . . .

. . . Southerners did not publish, did not write, did not read. Their appetite for information was Gargantuan but personal; it was either satisfied by oratory, or it was sated by gossip.²

It was against such lack of interest and taste that the Fugitive poets sallied forth in their journal (each Fugitive "quite simply a Foet: the Wanderer, or even the wandering Jew, the Outcast, the Man who carries the secret wisdom around the world"³), doing battle against the Philistine forces of an uncultured society for nearly four years, finally disintegrating as a group⁴ in December, 1925,

¹Letter to Charles Allen, May 16, 1939, as quoted in Frederick Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn Ulrich, The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography (Princeton, N. J., 1946), p. 121.

²The Woman Within (New York, 1954), pp. 104-105.

³Allen Tate, "The Fugitive, 1922-1925," p. 79.

⁴By early spring of 1924 the group spirit was beginning to disintegrate. Davidson writing to Tate in April recounted some of the disagreements and declared: "I have no heart for the work" (Letter, April 25, 1924). Tate, who went to New York in the fall of 1924, resigned from the Fugitive group the following spring, feeling that from a distance he would be unable to make his opinions count. Davidson in a letter to Tate just before The Fugitive ceased publication, alluded to another disorganizing factor: "I agree in the main with your estimate of poetry as a social defense and with your determination of the elements of likeness in Fugitive poetry and the reason therefor. I would only

because their individual careers as writers and teachers had begun to involve them more completely, because events and changes of the late 1920's in the South commanded from some of them a more inclusive defense of a particular kind of society necessary to support a tradition in which poetry could flourish. However, the core of the group--Ransom, Tate, Davidson, and Warren--continued their close friendship.

In considering the question of why the Fugitive group came into existence at all, Davidson speculates with a hypothesis on which he bases an answer:

Suppose that Ransom had been a Californian, Tate a native of Iowa, Warren of Kansas, Davidson of Maine, Hirsch of New York, and so on; and suppose that we had somehow assembled at Nashville, through scholarship aid or the magnetic attraction of Dan McGugin's football teams. Would this Fugitive group then have appeared, even if we had had exactly the same degree of literary interest and ability? I cannot imagine such a phenomenon. There would have been individual poets, no doubt, and they might have known each other, even casually worked together, but there would not have been a "group" in any cohesive sense, much less this particular "Fugitive" group.

In personnel, as well as in character the Fugitive group differed from the Agrarian. Both included distinguished names and the central figures and founders of each were the same: John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson. All

supplement your remarks by saying that I do believe most of us really have approached poetry as a fine art and not in the spirit of dilettantes or moralists. That has been our great strength,--that and our seriousness. But I will acknowledge that the defeatism crept in, some strain of it at least, in the bulk of Fugitive poetry; and so our 'pure art' has here and there been touched with indignation or with wistfulness depending on the reaction of the writer to his confinements" (November 29, 1925).

Unlike many other little magazines, The Fugitive had no serious financial troubles, and its demise was not the result of insufficient support. Wealthy Nashville businessmen, the Associated Realtors, Ward-Belmont College, and, of course, a goodly number of subscribers sustained the venture for nearly four years.

¹"The Thankless Muse and Her Fugitive Poets," Southern Writers in the Modern World, pp. 16-17.

of the three served, in either official or unofficial capacity, as editors of both The Fugitive and I'll Take My Stand. But, except for them and Robert Penn Warren, who was first published in The Fugitive in the summer of 1923 and was elected to the staff in February, 1924, and Andrew Lytle, who was made editor for the last issues in 1925, the two groups were essentially different.¹

In character, too, the Fugitive group was distinctive from the later Agrarian brotherhood. Although one can explain the Fugitives' presence at Vanderbilt as an historical accident, as Tate did on the occasion of the Fugitive reunion in 1956, other factors seem less a matter of chance. They were devoted, as Donald Davidson recently expressed it, to

¹ Other members of the Fugitives who were, at that time or later, professionally devoted to writing or to teaching literature, included Walter Clyde Curry, eminent Chaucer scholar and retired head of the English department of Vanderbilt University; the late William Frierson, authority in French literature, author of studies on the continental and English novel and professor of English at the University of Alabama; Ridley Wills, novelist and former Nashville newspaperman, and the late Stanley G. Johnson, former Vanderbilt faculty member and administrator whose novel, The Professor (1925), depicts and satirizes through a thin veneer some of the personalities and activities of his Fugitive days. Future businessmen who took poetry seriously were also welcomed to the group: the late James Marshall Frank, host at the early meetings; Alec Brock Stevenson, Nashville investment banker, Jesse Wills, who became executive vice-president of the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, and the late Alfred Starr, formerly a mathematician, who was a Nashville moving picture theater owner. Sidney Mtttron Hirsch, named as "one of the guiding lights" of the Fugitives at their reunion in May, 1956, wrote a script for a Greek pageant, "The Fire Regained," which was produced in Nashville's Centennial Park. William Yandell Elliott, whose creative impulses were channeled into the field of political science, is now head of the Department of Government at Harvard, while the late Merrill Moore, eminent Boston psychiatrist, managed to combine a career in science with the publication of more sonnets than any other author has produced in the history of literature. Laura Riding (Gottschalk) was elected to membership although she did not live in Nashville and was never closely associated with the group (John Bradbury, The Fugitives, p. 4; John Seigenthaler, The Nashville Tennessean, May 3, 1956).

the cause of the "thankless muse." Theirs was a dedication worthy of high priests; "the group mind," it was declared in the second issue of The Fugitive, "is evidently neither radical nor reactionary, but quite catholic, and perhaps excessively earnest in literary dogma."¹ In a love for the art of poetry and in a respect for words they found themselves on common ground. A student of Allen Tate's poetry wrote of the group:

. . . they were "university men" in the simplest sense of the term. They admired learning, intelligence, the traditions of humane letters and values, and they believed that poetry was the repository, protector, and projector of these. Poetry was always, in itself, [in] poem after poem, a kind of special knowledge, not scientific. . . .²

From their Fugitive activities--contributing to their magazine, criticizing each others' poems (those to be published were selected by balloting), and editing--they learned that "fine poetry was a vital part of immediate life so that a sense of literature became a part of the art of living."³ Like the Agrarians, all were quite closely united in friendship when The Fugitive was being published, but they seemed more lighthearted about their cause, less militant than were the Agrarians. In the first two issues of The Fugitive the identities of the contributors were hidden by poetically imaginative names, "less for concealment," Tate recalls, than for "romance."⁴ The pseudonyms furnish evidence of the group's youthful playfulness: Ransom was Roger Prim; Tate, adopting a name from a Hawthorne story, was Henry Feather-top; Davidson chose to be Robin Gallivant.⁵ Here in The

¹ June, 1922, p. 34.

² Lee F. Gerlach, "The Poetry and Strategies of Allen Tate," p. 90.

³ Robert Penn Warren, Fugitive Reunion, May 3, 1956, Vanderbilt University.

⁴ The Fugitive, 1922-1925, p. 80.

⁵ Other contributors were disguised with the names of Marpha (Curry), Jonathan David (Johnson), Drimonigher and King Badger (Stevenson), Dendric (Moore), Philora (Frank), and L. Gafer (Hirsch). The names were dropped after the

Fugitive was an activity that engaged not only their individual talents but also their considerable capacity to fight for art. They regarded their campaign for poetry as a group activity. The announcement of Davidson and Tate as editor and associate editor, respectively, in the fall issue of 1923 emphasized:

. . . the ancient policy of group action endures, and the present reform is the practical one of securing the expedition of editorial business rather [than] a move toward oligarchy and the concentration of power. The Group continues in its sovereignty, and shall continue, until all Fugitives are perished from the earth.¹

In a "Postscript" appended to one of Merrill Moore's clippings John Crowe Ransom spoke warmly of their group spirit that prevailed particularly in the early days of their activity:

That was a group effort beyond anything I have ever taken part in. Its quality was rare and fine as a piece of co-operation; I do not mean to be passing judgment on the poetic output. That was no better than it should be, though I suppose it was good enough not to leave us looking foolish after so much pains. They were the best days I ever had.²

Yet there were sources of disagreement--as there were to be later on broader questions among the Agrarians. A variety of issues--free verse or traditional form, narrowness or breadth of theme, abstraction or concreteness in their poetry, obscurity or obviousness, technical, formal vocabulary or a more natural diction--all served to divide the group, and led one scholar of the

second issue. Mrs. Cowan, commenting on this "romantic and playful gesture" suggests that the pseudonyms indicate "their love for word play and for speculation concerning the derivation and archaic use of words" (The Fugitive Group, p. 46).

¹"The Other Half of Verse," The Fugitive, II (August-September, 1923), 98.

²June 25, 1939, in The Fugitive, Clippings and Comment, collected by Merrill Moore (Boston, 1939), p. 11.

Fugitives to declare: "They were never to function actually as a unit; their thinking was too individualistic, too forth-right for real group action."¹ Indeed, one might add, their cohesion as a group--even though their poetry has been described as "traditional," "formal," "cerebral," and "ironic"²--comes from their close association and friendship rather than from a common theory. Warren remarked recently:

I think there is a great fallacy in assuming that there was a systematic program behind the Fugitive group. There was no such thing, and among the members there were deep differences in temperament and aesthetic theory. They were held together by geography and poetry. They all lived in Nashville, and they were all interested in poetry. . . . They met informally to argue philosophy and read each other the poems they wrote. For some of them these interests were incidental to their main concerns.

¹ Louise Cowan, "The Fugitive: A Critical History," (Ph. D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1953), pp. 142, 100.

² Whatever the Fugitive poets had in common as a "style" can be most readily seen in their last joint project, a selection of poetry from their writing of four years. Fugitives, An Anthology of Verse, published in 1928, with a phoenix on the dust cover, represented symbolically the revival of something they had thought dead. All of the poets who appeared in the volume liked the title page, reported Davidson, "seeing in it the 'Phoenix-Fugitive,' [arising] out of the ashes of the old Regime" (Letter to Allen Tate, January 27, 1928, as quoted by Cowan, The Fugitive Group, p. 253). The anthology was generally well received, and merited from critic Edmund Wilson the observation that what the eleven poets have in common are "an accent of irony, a 'metaphysical' turn and a rich English vocabulary"; from the strength of this position, he continued, they have developed an original vein of imagery. "Now . . . we are beginning to get a literature which is as free from the flowers of rhetoric as from the formulas of galantry. . . . [it is] capable of being merciless and astringent" ("The Tennessee Poets," The New Republic, LIV [March 7, 1928], 103).

Mark Van Doren wrote of the volume: "An intensely interesting document" and described the Fugitives' association as one of the best ways of writing poetry, like that of the thirteenth century Italian poets and of the symbolists in France. "Intricate both in form and content, [the poems] will produce a kind of pleasure . . . not known . . . with widely advertised schools of American poetry," he concluded ("First Glance," The Nation, CXXVI [March 14, 1928], 296).

For a couple of others, like Tate, it was poetry or death. Their activity wasn't any "school" or "program." Mutual respect and common interests--that was what held them together--that and the provincial isolation, I guess.¹

It was a remarkable sustained relationship, and the fact that the central figures were the same in both groups has led to a frequent, uncritical identification of later Agrarian concerns with Fugitive principles and achievements. Even so informed a critic as Henry Wells, friend and biographer of the late Merrill Moore, does not differentiate between the character of the two groups:

They thirsted for something new and at the same time for something old; for a more honest adjustment to the present and actual needs of English poetry as well as to an illustrious past. . . . They were fugitives both from contemporary society and from by far the greater number of contemporary poets. They were fugitives from the New South as this was generally understood, for in their eyes this signified merely the Old North of bourgeois vulgarities, industrialism and uncritical democracy, an anti-civilization with no true principles, at the mercy of the banker, advertiser, businessman, sportsman and gangster.²

It is clear from letters, from the literary productions of the group, and from the facts of chronology that the two ventures were quite distinctive. As Davidson has pointed out, the Agrarian program did not develop until The Fugitive and activities connected with it had ended. What the two groups did have in common was the close friendship of a nucleus of writers--Ransom, Davidson, Tate, and Warren--who over a period of several years brought into being the Agrarian movement. Widely separated geographically,³ the

¹"The Art of Fiction, XVIII," Paris Review, No. 16 (Spring-Summer, 1957), 121-22.

²Poet and Psychiatrist, Merrill Moore, M. D.: A Critical Portrait (New York, 1955), p. 34.

³During the three years of gestation for I'll Take My Stand, Ransom and Davidson were teaching at Vanderbilt; Tate was free-lancing in New York, then writing in France on a Guggenheim award; and Warren was studying at California and at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar.

four former Fugitives began consciously to examine their attitude toward their heritage and view of modern society as each was related to their activities, first as men of letters, and then as Southerners.

Pre-Agrarian Views, Publications, and Activities

A growing consciousness of being Southern and what this implied most clearly distinguished the Agrarians from the Fugitives. For these Southerners came to consider themselves as sons fighting for a beleaguered land. The South, they were suggesting in their personal and published writings, had too long been treated as a colonial dependent. They saw the values they believed inherent in a land-based economy being dissipated by the erosion of a Civil War and Reconstruction-induced poverty, or engulfed by the overwhelming wave of industrialism crested with the irresistible power of Northern finance capitalism. And they became angry. They began to fight. Their weapons were their books, reviews, their articles on literature, their biographies of persons important in Southern history, and in some instances, their poetry. Through the latter part of the 1920's they fought their small skirmishes individually. And they began to realize as the South became more and more impoverished and the nation plunged toward financial chaos that their separate efforts, whether they were consciously intentional defenses (in their articles) of a way of life they wished to preserve--or unconscious defenses of values embodied in their poetry and novels, were likely to be ineffectual.

The Agrarians' conscious allegiance to the South is a matter of both private and public record. From Fugitive days, when they reacted against professional Southernism¹ in poetry

¹ They had taken strong exception to Harriet Monroe's opinion that the "soft-silken reminiscent life of the Old South is becoming articulate"; her suggestion that Southern poets undertake to interpret "a region so specialized in beauty, so rich in racial tang and prejudice, so jewel-weighted with a heroic past" elicited from them in an

or criticism as they fled from the high-caste Brahmins of the Old South--asserting that "without raising the question of whether the blood in the veins of its editors runs red, they are not advertising it as blue"--they had moved toward a defense of their heritage. And this consciousness resulted from a number of experiences--both of a biographical and intellectual nature.

In explaining how the symposium came into being, Donald Davidson pointed out that most of the group had, as he called it, "a good deal of cosmopolitanism in our systems, the result of travel or residence abroad or of prolonged absorption in literature, pedagogy or technical research."¹ Although one might question the label "cosmopolitanism" as precisely descriptive of the Agrarians' views, what is important is the fact that their physical, intellectual, or spiritual absence from the South (before the planning of the symposium) gave them a perspective on their heritage. Four

editorial protest by Davidson this response: "Undoubtedly the Old South is literary material to those who may care to write about it. But many may not. It is not the province of any critic to dictate the material these many may choose. They will guffaw at the fiction that the Southern writer of today must embalm and serve up as an ancient dish. They will create what is nearest and dearest in experience--whether it be old or new, North, South, East, or West.--And what business is that of Aunt Harriet's?" (The Fugitive, II [June-July, 1923], 66).

Allen Tate, writing to the subscription editor of Poetry Magazine made even more explicit the dislike of what was considered the proper "Southern" attitude for writers: ". . . we fear very much to have the slightest stress laid upon Southern traditions in literature; we who are Southerners know the fatality of such an attitude--the old atavism and sentimentality are always imminent" (June 22, 1923, quoted by Louise Cowan, The Fugitive Group, p. 116). And the following spring, after the publication of Davidson's An Outland Piper which had not received much notice in the South, Tate wrote Davidson: "It's just like the damn Southerners. No wonder we all get disgusted and want to leave. Some of us can't leave, though, which if it isn't a victory for them, certainly a kind of defeat for us. . . ." (May 7, 1924, ibid., p. 163).

¹"I'll Take My Stand: A History," 308.

of the group--Owsley, Nixon, Ransom and Davidson--had been subjected to an uprooting through World War I. Ransom and Warren were Rhodes scholars, Ransom from 1910-1913 and Warren from 1928-1930, while Tate spent two years in France (1928-1930). John Gould Fletcher had chosen to be an expatriate from the United States for some twenty-three years, living in England for most of that time and finally returning permanently in 1933.¹ Several of the group had either studied or taught in the North or mid-West.² Others launched their careers as writers or scholars in New York: Allen Tate had fled there from what had seemed to him the uncongenial, stultifying South late in 1924; there as a free-lance writer he sent off poetry and articles to the New Republic, The Nation, The Saturday Review of Literature, the Literary Digest, Hound and Horn, Bookman, and Poetry. By the time the symposium was being planned Stark Young was a professional drama critic and novelist: his reviews and articles appeared regularly in the New Republic, the Theatre Arts Monthly, and the New York Times; he was associate editor of the Theatre Arts Monthly and a member of the editorial staff of the New Republic. Andrew Lytle's training and experience in drama

¹Fletcher left for Italy in 1908 after receiving an inheritance from his father; he settled in London the following spring and made his residence in England except for a two-year stay in America during the World War and short visits through the latter part of the 1920's and early 1930's.

²Kline had gone to high school in New York state and had begun his college education at the Case Institute of Technology in Cleveland. Warren, after completing an M. A. in English at California, went to Yale. Owsley and Nixon followed the same path from Alabama to Chicago to study under William E. Dodd, with Nixon remaining in the mid-West for three years, teaching at Iowa State College. Lytle after his Vanderbilt B. A. in 1925, spent a year at the Yale School of Drama (1927-28). Lanier was an instructor in psychology at New York University from 1926-1928. Stark Young, a graduate student at Columbia (1902), returned North after several years at Mississippi and Texas to teach at Amherst College (1915-21). Georgian Donald Wade was a graduate student at Harvard (1915) and at Columbia from which he received the Ph. D. in 1924.

took him to New York in 1928, where he acted professionally in The Grey Fox, and for six months read intensively at the New York Public Library for his biography of Bedford Forrest.

War experiences and the absence from family, friends, and familiar places have the effect of sharpening the appreciation of one's own home land. These Agrarians who were emotionally and intellectually involved in the spirit-scarring War also reacted nostalgically. Donald Davidson reveals such a feeling of longing and understanding when he recalls reading in manuscript some of John Crowe Ransom's earliest poems later published in Poems About God: "When I read those poems in France, by candlelight in some peasant's house in the Côte d'Or or Yonne, or some ruined village near the Western Front, they still blurred my exploring, eager eyes, even though at that distance I could more gratefully recognize in them the Tennessee country I had left."¹ To John Gould Fletcher, who was in Switzerland at the outbreak of the War and who returned a few months later to an America and a South he had abandoned as uncouth and narrow, World War I was a revelation of his own heritage as a Southerner:

. . . now I felt that what I had already seen of the European War at close range had modified my own early attitude to the Civil War. During my boyhood the stories of the Civil War that I had heard from members of my father's generation, so much older than I, but still living on their memories of the great contest, had seemed to me at best only tedious legends. During my college years, Lincoln and Stephen Douglas, Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, had all been less real to me as human beings than Whistler, Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, Baudelaire, Swinburne, and William Morris. I had gone abroad because I was already tired of American history, and wished to learn something of art, which seemed to me both better and more important than history. . . . The War had already taught me that there was no escape from history. Had the people of France been conquered by the Germans, their culture destroyed, their homes despoiled, they would have looked on their lost heritage no differently than the folk of my father's generation. It would have become, to them, something so

¹"The Thankless Muse and Her Fugitive Poets," Southern Writers in the Modern World, p. 15.

uniquely precious that nothing in it needed modification, and they would have lived solely on its memory, without making any further effort. So my father's generation had largely lived; but I had been too young, too restless, and too aesthetically sophisticated to realize that fact. Now I saw that the Civil War had actually been fought, and what it had done to my people. The European conflict brought it all back.¹

An intensified sensibility to their heritage was also experienced by the Agrarians who left their home to study in "alien" environments. Ransom recalls that his three years (1910-1913) at Oxford supplemented his training in the classics which he had secured at Vanderbilt, and confirmed his respect for the education he had enjoyed in the South. He sensed a feeling of independence at Oxford and came back with a new quietness and a new sense of maturity.² Perhaps it was this sojourn abroad, combined with his wide reading, that led him to observe in 1929, in his defense of the South's tradition: "The South is unique on this continent for having founded and defended a culture which was according to the European principle of culture"--a principle which he described as "an intention to live materially along the inherited line of least resistance in order to put the surplus of energy into the free life of the mind." England, he continued, was the model for the South in so far as Southern culture was not quite indigenous. But Ransom's England was an England of the Age of Reason, not an England of commercialism and industrialism:

The arts of the section . . . were not immensely passionate, creative and romantic; they were the Eighteenth Century social arts of dress, conversation, manners, the table, the hunt, politics, oratory, the pulpit. These were arts of living and not arts of escape; they were also community arts. . . . The South took life easy, which is itself a tolerably comprehensive art.³

¹Life Is My Song (New York, 1937), pp. 195-196.

²Louise Cowan, "The Fugitive, . . ." p. 35.

³"The South Defends Its Heritage," 109, 111.--Two years before Ransom had written Tate: "I don't write consciously as a Southerner or a non-Southerner. It is perhaps for that reason that I am not willing as yet to confess that

Warren, too, some years later evaluated the relations of his own Southerness to his development as a writer. He recalls:

In the spring of 1930 I was in Oxford, doing graduate work. I guess I was homesick, and not knowing it. Paul Rosenfeld, who was with Van Wyck Brooks and Lewis Mumford, was then editing the old American Caravan, wrote and asked me why I didn't try a long story for them. He had had the patience one evening to listen to me blowing off about night-rider stories from boyhood. So Oxford and homesickness, or at least back-homeward-looking, and Paul Rosenfeld made me write Prime Leaf, a novelette, which appeared in the Caravan, and was later the germ of Night Rider. I remember playing hookey from academic work to write the thing, and the discovery that you could really enjoy trying to write fiction. It was a new way of looking at things, and my head was full of recollections of the way objects looked in Kentucky and Tennessee. It was like going back to the age of twelve, going fishing and all that. It was a sense of freedom and excitement.¹

In 1956 on the occasion of the Fugitive reunion at Vanderbilt, Warren spoke still more explicitly of his first consciousness of his Southern heritage:

. . . as I remember the thing as it came to me, . . . it hit me at an age when I was first away from this part of the country for any period of time having lived in California two years, and a year in New Haven in the Yale Graduate School, and then in Oxford. And I had broken out of the kind of life I was accustomed to in that part of the world I knew. And there was a sentimental appeal for me in this . . . and an attempt to relive something--to recapture, to reassess. This was not thought out; it was just what happened in a sort of instinctive way.²

Richard Weaver, a personal friend of several of the Agrarians, wrote of those who had traveled abroad:

I shall be compelled to keep on writing poetry for the very consideration that makes me believe that that way lies health and sanity; but I have a notion that it will become more and more radical and fundamental and less and less local" (Letter, February 20, 1927). Yet the amount of poetry he wrote after 1930 was slight, and the number of his essays in defense of the South and the agrarian tradition was significant.

¹"The Art of Fiction, XVIII," p. 121.

²Fugitives' Reunion (Nashville, 1959), pp. 208-209.

[They] saw a deep-rooted organic society, held together by non-empirical bonds, and expressing in its structure a certain differentiation of calling. . . . It appeared broadly true . . . that the notorious conservatism of the South was but the European character of its institutions. . . . If their old-fashioned quality turned out to be their identification with a great tradition, it was obvious that much of the criticism of the South was superficially--or presumptuously based. . . . Following such experience, it was only natural that these voyagers should return home determined to take a fresh look at their inheritance, to strip from it those accretions which were historical and geographical accidents, and to see whether the remainder deserved a champion. In effect, they brought to the interpretation of the Southern past a new realism.¹

For Frank Owsley, the shock of recognition apparently came when he was pursuing his studies in Southern history at the University of Chicago, and reached a responsive consciousness by the time the symposium was being planned:

. . . all this time I was working in history, working in Southern and in sectional history, and more and more aware, both as an individual as well as a member of a group of friends, at least, that the people of America were losing the basic values of civilization, that we were going as a nation into materialism, that money value had become the real basic value, that the sense of community was disappearing, that the common courtesies of life were disappearing--particularly in the North where I went to school as a younger fellow--that you went into a store and were insulted rather than welcomed, that the whole civilization of this country was becoming cruder and cruder, that the things that we thought a civilized country stood for were disappearing. You know the old phraseology in those days was "revolt against the Philistines"--really a revolt against crudeness and rudeness, against those who favored gadgets, and things that concerned everyday conveniences.²

Warren's description of this effect of cultural shock, while embracing an historical perspective of the Italian Renaissance, Elizabethan England, and New England of the 1830's, was applied specifically to the experience of Southern writers

¹ "Agrarianism in Exile," The Sewanee Review, LVIII (October-December, 1950), 588-589.

² Fugitives' Reunion, p. 204.

after World War I; it was the experience of the Agrarians about which he spoke also:

After 1918 the modern industrial world, with its good and bad, hit the South, all sorts of ferments began. As for individual writers, almost all of them of that period had had some important experience outside the South, then returned there--some strange mixture of continuity and discontinuity in their experience--a jagged quality.¹

When Allen Tate, still a Fugitive, went to New York late in 1924, he left the South apparently with a sense of relief, perhaps with a feeling of escape. Had all the South been like Vanderbilt--a "Thracian Athens"²--he might have launched his career in his native environment. But the South was no cultural mecca, as he himself suggested in a comment on the relationship of environment to creativity in art; possibly Tate had himself in mind as well as Stark Young and Ellen Glasgow whom he names later:

But the arts everywhere spring from a mysterious union of indigenous material and foreign influences: there is no great art or literature that does not bear the marks of this fusion. So I cannot assume, as Mr. Ransom seems to do, that exposure to the world of modernism . . . was of itself a demoralizing experience. Isn't it rather that the Southerner before he left home had grown weak in his native allegiance? That his political and social history, and his domestic life, had been severely adulterated no less by his fellow Southerners than by people in the North to whom he fled?³

New York was the place one had to go if he wished to be published, if he intended to earn his living as a writer. That Tate realized this was apparent not only because he went to New York but also because a decade later (1935) he was pleading for a Southern publishing system to obviate the need for such transplanting as he had undergone:

¹"The Art of Fiction, XVIII," p. 123.

²Robert Lowell's phrase in "John Ransom's Conversations," The Sewanee Review, LVI (Summer, 1948), 375.

³"The Profession of Letters in the South," The Man of Letters in the Modern World, Selected Essays: 1928-1955 (New York, Meridian Books, 1955), p. 318.

There is no reason why the Southern writer should not address a large public, but if he does he will learn sooner or later that--but for happy accidents--the market, with what the market implies, dictates the style. To create a profession of literature in the South we should require first an independent machinery of publication. . . . The literary artist is seldom successful as a colonial; he should be able to enjoy the normal belief that he is at the center of the world. One aid to that feeling would be a congenial medium of communication with his public. . . .

. . . I suppose the benefits of a Southern system would lie chiefly in this: that the Southern writer would not have to run the New York gauntlet, from which he emerges with a good understanding of what he can and cannot do.¹

But in 1925 Tate was not so certain that the answer to the Southern writer's dilemma lay in the South. As a free-lance reviewer for The New Republic and The Nation, he was writing articles somewhat critical of an ante-bellum kind of culture which had failed utterly, he felt at this time, in giving the South a tradition in the arts. The images Tate chose to describe the South offer striking evidence of how his attitude toward his inherited culture was metamorphosed from disapproval to appreciative acceptance. The Old South, "never greatly distinguished for a culture of ideas," was for Tate in 1925 "the Charming Lady" who "will speak deft and serious conversation" but not too serious. Metaphors of industrialism and the machine indicate disapproval, but at this time they are applied to the South and her backwardness: "The South was proprietor of a particular mechanism of truth: it had to protect the mechanism against the removal of old parts and the fitting in of new. It was set upon being a One-horse Shay forever."² The Old South, he observed in 1925, was strictly a political and economic aristocracy. As such "[it] was beautifully devoted unto the death to its one idea--the permanence of a special politico-economic order. An essential

¹ Ibid., pp. 318-319.

² "Last Days of a Charming Lady," The Nation, CXXI (October 28, 1925), 485.

literature was impossible." Such a lack would, of course, have an effect on the contemporary Southerner:

The modern Southerner does not inherit, nor is he likely to have, a native culture compounded of the strength and subtlety of his New England contemporary's. But he may be capable, through an empiricism which is his only alternative to intellectual suicide, of a cosmopolitan culture to which his contemporary in the East is emotionally barred.¹

Donald Davidson, too, was personally uneasy in Nashville at this time and thought of moving to New York. To Tate late in 1925, he wrote:

I do fear New York somewhat, and am not anxious to be swallowed; but I don't think the Battle of New York would be much more dreadful than the Battle of Nashville, 1925. . . . I am restless, and all the more because I feel that I'm caught in a blind alley. And this is true even though I should really prefer to stay in the South, if only I were financially independent.

[November 29, 1925]

Within a half year Davidson had published in The Saturday Review of Literature an analysis of the dilemma of the Southern writer; in some respects the situation he described was comparable to his own as well as to that of certain fellow Fugitives:

[The Southern writer] is an alien particle in the body politic. And, by contrast, fresh ideas, new modes, new philosophies come to him from every quarter but the South. What wonder that his gaze flies beyond immediate surroundings to remote regions, and that if he addresses himself to his locale at all, he often does so with ironic discontent?²

Tate's stay in New York until 1928 and the following two years in France on a Guggenheim award were extraordinarily productive, not only in articles and book reviews, but also

¹ Ibid., 485, 486.

² "The Artist as Southerner," The Saturday Review of Literature, II (May 15, 1926), 782. It was this article which started Davidson toward a conscious and explicit affirmation of the Southern heritage as legitimate material for the artist.

in poetry and biography (both Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis were published before he returned to the South). The pattern of attitude that begins to emerge is a new appraisal of his heritage, ambivalent while appreciative. By early 1927, when his allegiance to the South was becoming more explicit in his reviews, Tate wrote to Davidson in a letter:

And, by the way, I've attacked the South for the last time, except in so far as it may be necessary to point out that the chief defect the Old South had was that in it which produced, through whatever cause, the New South. I think the test of the True Southern Spirit would be something like this: whenever the demagogue cries "nous allons!" if the reply is, "non, nous retardons!" then you may be sure the reply indicates the right values. The symptom of advance must be seen as a symptom of decay. . . .!

Although it was already suggested in some of his poetry, here was explicit evidence of Tate's spiritual return to his homeland; his physical return did not come until almost three years later, when he and his wife moved to Benfollly near Clarksville, Tennessee, shortly after they arrived from France. The move was noted by Southerner William S. Knickerbocker, then editor of The Sewanee Review, perhaps with tongue-in-cheek but also with a not unrepresentative description of Tate's reactions to his environments and experiences:

What did New York do to him? When he was an undergraduate in Tennessee, his future was almost marred by his quick response to hostile criticism of the South made by ill-informed outsiders; he could find no good in his native region but fled to what he thought were more congenial surroundings in the city of purple towers. But a miracle happened. The longer he stayed in New York, the fiercer became his Southern loyalties and his Northern antipathies. . . . Then the Guggenheim flight to Paris. And now back home. . . . Mr. Tate has come full circle. He has found that the South, whose cultural legacy he discovered while he sat by the waters of Babylon, is preferable to Manhattan in which to exercise his talents.²

¹March 1, 1927, quoted by Louise Cowan in The Fugitive Group, p. 244.

²"The Return of the Native," The Sewanee Review, XXXVIII (October-December, 1930), 480.

This consciousness of being Southern was expressed by other members of the Agrarian group; it led them to embody in their articles and creative work those elements of their tradition which made the South distinctive--and preferable to a Northern industrial society.

By hindsight it is possible to perceive how the twelve came to coalesce into a group. And what they were writing as individuals from 1925 to 1930, the attitudes they were expressing, and the effect of their research for their biographies on their views of Southern culture--all these factors served to make them "aware of themselves as a single group of men."¹ The fact that many of the twelve had contributed to Donald Davidson's syndicated book page in the Nashville Tennessean is not without significance. Davidson conceived of his page as a means of contributing to the literary and intellectual renaissance he believed was developing in the South. For this cause he solicited the aid of his friends and other distinguished faculty members at various Southern institutions.² The Agrarians who did reviews for the page--Tate, Lanier, Kline, Cwsley, Nixon, Warren, Ransom, and Wade, as well as Davidson, of course--were stimulated to a discussion not only of works of literature and criticism but also of history, philosophy, and political theory. Among the books reviewed by the group were Dewey's Experience and Nature and Character and Events, Mussolini's Autobiography, Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms, Huxley's Point Counterpoint, George Bernard Shaw's The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Christopher Hollis' An American Heresy, and H. G. Wells' The Open Conspiracy. The reviews were invariably searching and contributed to the realization of Davidson's goal--to make

¹"Introduction," I'll Take My Stand, p. ix.

²In addition to the Agrarians, a number of the earlier Fugitive group were regular contributors, including Walter Clyde Curry, Alec B. Stevenson, and Jesse Wills. One of a number of outside reviewers was Professor Grant C. Knight of the University of Kentucky.

his page "the most substantial and distinctive thing of its kind in the South and in the United States if possible."¹

On History

More coincidental but no less significant in discovering what the common convictions were which led to their group activity is the fact that they were engaged in writing biographies or making careful studies of figures important in the culture and history of the South, particularly of the Civil War period. John Donald Wade was the first of the group to write a full-length biography, a study of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, the Georgia judge whose reputation in the field of literature rests on Georgia Scenes. Sub-titled A Study in the Development of Culture in the South, the biography has been described by Davidson as representative of the South's literature of protest (in contrast to its literature of escape). There are undoubtedly a number of reasons why Longstreet appealed to Wade as a subject for a biography, but at least two stand out: Longstreet was a Georgian, a writer, and a preacher--and Wade's interest in these has been continuous and marked; Longstreet was also a farmer, an agrarian. Of him Wade reported: "To Longstreet rural life was always theoretically the life which was best and most normal; [his tutor's] students were good, he thought, because they were kept removed from cities--the city students who came to him were invariably disturbing elements."²

From 1928 to 1931 five other biographies appeared--and three of these were of Southern Civil War leaders: Tate's

¹Letter to Allen Tate, March 21, 1928.

²Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, A Study of the Development of Culture in the South (New York, 1924), pp. 60-61. Frances Newman, reviewer for the Atlanta Journal and the New York Herald-Tribune's "Books," considered Wade's Longstreet as "the first biography ever written in the state which was not as respectful to its subject as a funeral sermon" and "the first absolutely unfettered prose ever written in the state"--quoted by Edwin Mims, The Advancing South, pp. 251-52.

biographies of Stonewall Jackson (1928) and Jefferson Davis (1929), and Lytle's Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company (1931), the research for which had been done before the symposium was planned. John Brown was the subject of Warren's only biography, written while he was at Oxford and published in the United States in 1929. And John Donald Wade published in 1931 a full-length treatment of John Wesley. For all of these books the authors were involved with their subject's relationship to or influence on Southern history; even John Brown, who was presented as a kind of embodiment of the Puritan-Transcendentalist abolitionist, a fanatic, was a recreation of history, dramatized and interpreted in terms of a principle that was later to become a central theme of the Agrarian movement: the danger of living by abstract principles--whether these were abstractions of science, or in the case of Brown, of religion, according to his personal interpretation of religious truth.

John Donald Wade, too, reflected in an apparently far-removed subject--John Wesley--parallels between an industrializing England, an American Northeast, and possibly a New South. In his biography of the founder of Methodism,¹ Wade comments on the effect of a growing materialism and the power of the machine in England. Although he avoids making any explicit connection between the dissociation and degradation of the machine-working Englishman and the American, in the light of the ideas embodied in the symposium Wade's participation was understandable. The wide appeal of Wesley's preaching, Wade suggests, was needed in an England already threatened by the machine:

The old half-barbarous, half idyllic world had at length bred for its service, out of iron by steam, a new slave, a giant that was to prove a new master. And this giant, the machine, would soon be shouldering man from his accustomed places. That prospect was dimly felt everywhere, and man was a little dazed, not knowing just where

¹For a fuller discussion of Wade's familial involvement with Methodism, see his biographical sketch, Appendix B.

to turn. For he did not see as yet that the more machines could fabricate, the more man, for a while, at least, could put to his uses, and so need more workers to attend more machines, running to satisfy--and even to create--more wants.

.

Not often has carnality, always prone in English air to turn a bawdy slut, sidled so unashamed through dingy ways and lanes garlanded with spring. The rich grew richer, and poor poorer. . . .¹

More obviously related to the Southern cause the future Agrarians were to celebrate are the three biographies of Civil War figures, Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis, and Bedford Forrest. The core of Tate's first biography--an analysis of battles, military strategies, and the weaknesses and strengths of key Southern leaders²--was to be found, as one critic described it, "in his contrasts between Northern and Southern ways of life."³ One of its most noteworthy features, a New Republic reviewer asserted, was "the intensity of its Confederate patriotism and the zest with which it eats into the copper."⁴ While Tate was working on the biography, Davidson wrote him enthusiastically: "I am still more and more vastly excited over your new undertaking. . . . I hasten to offer some notes you may want to use. . . . Jackson's death at the hands of his own men is symbolic of what happened to the Confederacy through and through. We killed ourselves more than once and in more than one way . . . and we are continuing to do the same thing today, through the 'scalawags'."⁵ In his review later, Davidson remained enthusiastic about what might now be called the "mythic" character of the biography.

¹ John Wesley (New York, 1930), pp. 119-20.

² Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis, Generals Lee, Pope, Bragg, and President Polk.

³ John Bradbury, The Fugitives, p. 90.

⁴ A. W. Vernon in The New Republic, LIV (May 16, 1928), 404.

⁵ May 9, 1927.

More than a mere factual account of a Southern Civil War general,¹ the book, as Davidson saw it, was to be a guide to the South:

Not whim, but inner necessity and conviction brought Allen Tate to Stonewall Jackson. The troubled modern turns with relief to a figure that wears no uncertainty of the heroic, and finds cause to cleave to as well as true stuff of art. . . . We of the South all have Mr. Tate's problem: we must recover the past, or at least in some way realize it in order that we may bring the most genuine and essential parts of our own tradition forward in contact with the inevitable new tradition now in process of formation. Only thus can we achieve vital continuity in the national life.²

For Davidson, Tate's biography becomes a defensive bulwark. Delightedly endorsing Tate's view that the Northerners, not the Southerners, were "rebels," Davidson justifies Tate's myth-making:

. . . if the South's cause really was just, it is not being sentimental to say so; it is merely substituting a grand and honorable myth for a contrary and unnatural one. We shall not fight the Civil War over again; but there is no reason to believe that the North, with its notions of upsetting the Constitution, was divinely appointed to preserve the destinies of the United States and that the South was the wrongheaded and unruly member to be suppressed. . . . Mr. Tate in effect proposes to substitute the legend of the South for the legend of the North, building his mythology as it should be built around a grand historical figure. And, all things considered, I rather welcome the change. The one is just as American as the other, and I must confess it suits the fibre of my native being better than the cold, intellectual stuff you find in history books. Then let us salute Allen Tate, the first Southern biographer of the younger generation who has had the courage to worship an old hero and remember his fathers.³

Still more explicit in its contrast of two ways of

¹ The biography did, of course, deal with the "facts" of Jackson's life, interpretively. It depicts his military genius and his religious zeal sympathetically, and with admiration describes his brilliance on the field of battle.

² "Stonewall Jackson's Way," in "Critic's Almanac," The Nashville Tennessean, April 29, 1928.

³ Ibid.

life is Tate's second biography, Jefferson Davis (1929). Here, too, the approach to the analysis of events is dichotomous:

The South was the last stronghold of European civilization in the Western hemisphere, a conservative check upon the restless expansiveness of the industrial North, and the South had to go. The South was permanently old-fashioned, backward-looking, slow, contented to live upon a modest conquest of nature, unwilling to conquer the earth's resources for the fun of conquest; contented, in short, to take only what man needs; unwilling to juggle the needs of man in the illusory pursuit of abstract wealth.¹

Southern views of ante-bellum history, of Southern leaders, of Southern convictions about education, slavery, class structure, and a variety of subjects are all defended in Tate's account of the tragedy of a man defeated by pride. "The issue," wrote Tate, "was class rule and religion versus democracy and science."² Like other works preceding the symposium, Jefferson Davis was intended to strengthen the Southern position. Davidson voiced his warm approval about the biography's underlying meaning which, he wrote Tate, might not be "easily perceptible" to readers who do not know "what you are finally after." Your book, he continued,

. . . fortifies the Southern position immensely to clear up certain old issues and also to throw overboard certain debris--you do that. . . . It's written with great effectiveness. . . . You are moving right on the wave of popular interest, and yet you are not merely exploiting that popular interest,--you are shrewdly informing it and teaching it something worth learning.

[October 26, 1929]

Andrew Lytle's Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company³ (1931) similarly assumed that the Civil War was based on a

¹ Jefferson Davis, His Rise and Fall (New York, 1929), p. 301.

² Ibid., p. 87.

³ Forrest was one of the Confederacy's unrecognized but outstanding officers, a Tennessean "red-neck" cavalry commander who later became a plantation owner, Grand Commander of the Ku Klux Klan, and an investor in railroads.

contrast between two ways of life which, Lytle declared, both Calhoun and Seward were aware of: "It was the conflict between a people living almost entirely on the land and a people loyal to a commercial and fast-growing industrialism which demanded that the duty of the citizen must be not life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness but a willing consumption of the produce of Northern manufacture."¹ With great narrative skill, Lytle pictures Forrest as "a typical strongman of the agrarian South,"² a "protagonist of a provincial culture." The biographer's admiration for his hero is apparent throughout the study.

On Religious Tradition

Biographies were not the only full-length prose works consciously written in support of a "traditional South." One of the most remarkable books to come out of this ferment was Ransom's God Without Thunder, an Unorthodox Defense of Orthodoxy, published shortly before the symposium. Ransom's explication of an Old Testament God of justice and wrath as one of the indispensable religious myths of Western culture is prefaced with an apology that reveals his unpretentious modesty as well as his thesis:

I am the son of a theologian, and the grandson of another one, but the gift did not come down to me. When I handle the venerable symbols of an ancient faith, I am well aware that my touch is too heavy, and does some outrage. . . . This work of mine is mere lay work, and meant for laity.

The [book] I have written is done in the hope of edifying the novices, whose advancement I have not myself exceeded very far; . . .

¹Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company (New York, 1931), p. 30.

²Henry Steele Commager, "The Terror of the Damyankees," The New Republic, LXVII (July 22, 1931), 266. Reviewing Lytle's first book, Commager questioned this portrayal of Forrest by asserting, "It is certainly a portrait of a frontiersman; possibly of an empire builder. It would hang just as comfortably in San Francisco or Minneapolis or Chicago as in Richmond."

It is my thesis that religion in the new sense, as science would not elect to have it, is a comparatively poor kind of religion--that it is barely religious at all, that it is as irreligious as can be.¹

In a letter to Allen Tate, July 4, 1929, Ransom indicated his preoccupation with religion and its relationship to his concern about economics and Southern culture. Declaring that religion is the only effective defense against Progress and America's "very vicious economic system," and the only guarantee of the enjoyment of life, he wrote:

Religion is fundamental and prior to intelligent (or human) conduct on any plane. I had this in mind even in so secular a paper as my Southern one; but of course didn't venture to press the point there.²

Since last February I've been writing a hot and hasty book on religion which I hope to complete this summer--an interlude in my aesthetic interests, and far from being disconnected with them--it can't possibly be a really finished and permanent book under the circumstances, but nevertheless it's a sincere book and one that somebody ought to write. It will be called Giants for Gods, I think.

Naming the myth systems in terms of god-figures: Prometheus, Satan, the Hebrew Prometheus ("the Lucifer of the spirit of the Renaissance"); and Jesus, "a Giant [whose] function . . . was to decline to set up as a God," Ransom observed: "Little by little the God of the Jews has been whittled down into the Spirit of Science, or the Spirit of Love, or the Spirit of Rotary; and now religion is not religion at all, but a purely secular experience, like Y.M.C.A. and Boy Scouts." The approach of this layman's view of theology was metaphorical; the burden of his argument was a denunciation of science and the materialistic mind:

Our mechanical successes have altered deeply our attitude toward the world, and toward the God who embodies its direction. . . . It seemed after that [discovery of the gravitational principle] that everything was humanly

¹"A Letter," God Without Thunder (New York, 1930), pp. ix, 10.

²The article he refers to was probably "The South Defends Its Heritage" in Harper's Magazine.

knowable and practicable. . . . This is a pitch of confidence to which the worshipers of a sterner and more awful God did not aspire.

In the new religion of science God is supposed to have had the goodness to invite man to profiteer upon the universe.¹

The modern, scientific man has created an anthropomorphic God; he has replaced the orthodox, stern and inscrutable God of Israel with an amiable and understandable God, one who would "agree to scrap all the wicked thunderbolts in his armament."² Ransom suggests that man's separation from the land, his attempt to dominate nature through the machine, his succumbing to the easy doctrines of "social benevolence and of physical welfare" as his religious credo ("developed popularly out of the Christ of the New Testament") are evidence of his loss of orthodoxy:

Religionists are almost inevitably agrarians rather than industrialists--they find a God readily when they make contact with the elemental soil, and with more difficulty as their habitations and occupations increase in artificiality and in distance from the soil.³

Man's religious awe, inspired by the inscrutable, was, in Ransom's opinion, replaced by scientific knowledge which "is ruthless and exclusive, while esthetic knowledge aiming at the fullness of the object, is inclusive." For Ransom, the aesthetic sensibility is stultified in a mechanistic culture which has created its god in the image of itself--a God without thunder.

On Sectional Allegiance

Even in their poetry and fiction, published before 1930, some of the Agrarians disclosed in both choice of material and more significantly in treatment their concern with the values of their heritage. This is not to imply that in their literary work they were producing primarily polemical

¹God Without Thunder, p. 25.

²Ibid., p. 5.

³Ibid., p. 124.

documents in defense of the South. Rather, they wrote of what they knew best--the locale and culture with which they were imbued--material that, as Warren once put it, "nagged you enough to stir the imagination."¹ And, the effect of their books was that of "bringing the Southern past, which was close to them and dear, into focus with the realities of the present."² Donald Davidson, for instance, in 1926 began writing a "closely related group . . . of poems" out of the history of Tennessee and his personal heritage. The Tall Men, published in 1927, was the result; to Tate Davidson wrote: "I intend it to be a fairly complex portrait of a person (say myself) definitely located in Tennessee, sensitive to what is going on as well as what has gone on for some hundreds of years."³ The nine poems⁴ in the work are loosely held together by various moods--irony towards values and manifestations of modern civilization, nostalgic regret for the loss of past traditions, anger and belligerence over certain events in history, a lyric evocation of the beauties of the Tennessee landscape; the work represents the attempt of a Tennessean and

¹"The Art of Fiction, XVIII," 120.

²Willard Thorp, "The Arts: Writing," A Southern Reader (New York, 1955), p. 649. At this point Thorp was discussing the Southern writers of the twenties in particular whose work "amounted to a kind of coming home again . . . and a rediscovery of their region" (p. 648). Clearly the Fugitive-Agrarians are a part of this group.

³March 29, 1926.

⁴The separate sections are entitled "Prologue: The Long Street"; "The Tall Men"--celebrating the frontiersmen and their struggle with the Cherokee and Creek; "The Sod of Battle-Fields"--on Civil War experiences; "Geography of the Brain"; "The Faring"--on World War I; "Conversation in a Bedroom"--a kind of surrealist dream sequence; "The Breaking Mould"--in which Davidson examines the heritage of Christianity from Anglo-Saxon days to a modern South's evangelicalism; "Epithalamion"--a celebration of a love and marriage; and "Epilogue: Fire on Belmont Street"--a vision of an all-consuming fire threatening the destruction of man's city and very being. This poem, published separately, won the award of the Poetry Society of South Carolina in 1926.

a Southerner of the post-World-War-I period to come to terms with the present by juxtaposing a superior past. Published during the same year (1927), John Crowe Ransom's Two Gentlemen in Bonds contains two of his most "Southern" poems, "Antique Harvesters" and "Dead Boy," and one that might be said to embody a concern with a modern man's divided sensibility, "Man Without Sense of Direction." A sequence of twenty sonnets, from which the title of the volume is derived, similarly focuses on the "theme of the dissociation of the man of action from the man of speculation or the man of scientific directness from the man of aesthetic indirection. . . ."¹ Yet Ransom places the resolution of the problem neither with Paul, the sensual man of action, nor with Abbott, his brother, the sensitive poet. For in the last sonnet of the sequence their father (as spirit) speaks but finds no solution for the cleavage:

Weep or Sleep

Now I remember life; and out of me
Lawfully leaping the twin seed of my loins,
Brethren, whom no split fatherhood disjoins;
But in the woman's-house how hatefully
They trod upon each other! til now I see
My manhood halved and squandered, two heads, two hearts,
Each partial son, despising the other's parts;
And so it is, and so it always will be.

Yet might it be precarious to weep
With eyesslack--fastened and shake these rusty joints;
I am a specter, even if at some points
A father, touched too tender by his issue;
So weak and dusty I perceive my tissue,
I must not crack it--I will turn and sleep.²

In the period of the ferment toward Agrarianism, Allen Tate published two collections of verse, Mr. Pope and Other Poems (1928) and Three Poems (1930), containing his most famous

¹ John Stewart, "The Fugitive-Agrarian Writers,"
p. 195.

² Two Gentlemen in Bonds (New York, 1927), p. 87.

single work, "Ode to the Confederate Dead," written about, as Tate said, "Narcissism, or any other ism that denotes the failure of the human personality to function objectively in nature and society." Tate is concerned with representing a conflict for which he chooses as one set of references material from his own heritage, the Confederate dead; "the poem, if it is successful," wrote Tate, "is a certain section of history made into experience, but only on this occasion, and on these terms; even the author of the poem has no experience of its history apart from the occasion and the terms."¹ The poem embodies in tension two themes, "'active faith' which has decayed, and the 'fragmentary cosmos' which surrounds us."² It is a conflict which in a variety of guises continues to concern the Agrarians well past the days of the symposium.

Five years after the appearance of I'll Take My Stand, Donald Davidson aptly described the coalescing of the group:

I do know that as individuals, observing and thinking separately, they arrived at the same general conclusions at about the same time. . . . I remember that we were greatly and very pleasantly surprised, when we first approached the Southern topic, to find ourselves in hearty agreement. Each had been cherishing his notions in solitude, hardly expecting them to win the approval of the determined moderns who were his friends.³

Their surprise at such concord is unexpected if one has given attention to their views as they appeared in articles and creative works even before the 1930 symposium.

What these notions were may be best described as paired alternatives, an approach focused on a central dualism (science versus art⁴) from which all the other dualisms were

¹"Narcissus as Narcissus," The Man of Letters in the Modern World, pp. 334, 336. For a further discussion of "Ode to the Confederate Dead," see pp. 119-124..

²Ibid., p. 337.

³"I'll Take My Stand--A History," 305.

⁴By "science" the Agrarians generally meant "applied science," the effects of technology. Along with this concept, however, they associated abstract thinking, the philosophy of

derivable. This assumption was basic to their system of thought and to their work as artists. In a letter to Allen Tate, written after the demise of the Fugitive, John Crowe Ransom spoke of the importance of dichotomy in his and Tate's view of art. Rejecting "Hegel's right to solve a pair of contradictions with a Triad," Ransom declares: "Here's a slogan: Give us Dualism, or we'll give you no Art. This slogan is counter to philosophy; we have a fight to make there as well as the simpler fight we make on science."¹

On Science, Industrialization, and Urbanization

This fight against science which led the Agrarians to oppose abstract reason, technology, specialization, proved to be more complex and extensive than Ransom at first foresaw. It was to be the myth through which the Agrarians rejected a Northern way of life and defended a Southern culture. Robert Penn Warren's understanding of Ransom's concept of a myth was a view to which the entire group would have subscribed; it was, in essence, the character and value of the Agrarian "myth":

A myth is a fiction, a construct, which expresses a truth and affirms a value. It is not an illustration of doctrine. It differs from allegory in that its components, not to be equated with anything else, function in their own right. It is the dynamic truth, the dynamic value. . . . myth represents a primary exercise of sensibility in which thought and feeling are one: it is a total communication.²

For the Agrarians-to-be "science" represented inversely the

progress, mechanism. The term "art" does not represent adequately the other half of their dichotomy. In part, the reason is that they themselves settled on no single term as representative of what they wished to preserve and defend--the "aesthetic" in life, the religious, the humane.

¹Letter, Wednesday, dated by Allen Tate as "Spring, 1926?"

²"John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony," Virginia Quarterly Review, XI (January, 1935), 96.

characteristics of their South--and it was against these features that they inveighed during the late twenties: against industrialism and its concomitant evils--specialization and the dissociation of sensibility, against big business and commercialism, against "progress" and its manifestations in a New South--all elements of a Northern and Eastern way of life. At the same time they were defending agrarianism and the values they found inherent in or accruing to it--religion, stability, gentility--those characteristics of a "traditional" Southern culture. The problems they discussed foreshadowed the subjects of the symposium: art or the aesthetic life, religion, race, economy, progress, the Southern past.

Since the most prolific of the group were men of letters and several were committed to poetry,¹ it is not surprising that their purpose in defending the South stemmed from a determination to preserve the aesthetic value to enjoy, to love. And science, as they described it, had set itself

¹Before the Fugitive had ceased publication, Tate, for instance, had recognized the importance of poetry in the development of common principles: "[Your] most lucid and penetrating remarks on poetry . . . easily go to show that we are rapidly approaching a common ground of principles, of which the fundamental one is that poetry must be an expression of the whole mind--not gurgles and spasms and ecstasies over every wayside hawthorne bush; in other words, it is not, as you say, a report of sensation; it is a resolution of sensation through all the faculties of the mind. . . ." (Letter to Donald Davidson, July 25, 1925, as quoted by Cowan, The Fugitive Group, pp. 205-206.)

Less than a year later, Ransom was writing Tate: "(The obligation to be aesthetic is the obligation to open one's eyes very wide. Little pig-eyes can't do this--they focus too tightly; there is a physical property which we can actually apprehend here, an eye which definitely looks capable of vision, and a good chapter could base on just such an eye and develop most of the laws of aesthetics.) Aesthetic experience of course requires will and effort, but the will to stand still and get out of oneself, not the will to hurry on and to impose oneself. Here again we get back to first psychological principles, and to Kant's several exclusions by which the beautiful is not the desirable, not the possessible, not the good, not the useful, etc. My point here is simply that poetry, like all the arts, is simply a necessary variety of thinking, and will take place everywhere and at all times indifferently" (Letter, April 3 (and 13) [1926], dated by Allen Tate).

in opposition to the aesthetic life. Ransom voiced the reason for their opposition to science in his God-Without Thunder:

Scientific knowledge is always crystal clear--like a geometrical pattern. It is hard and logical--as it must be in order to serve the Logos. But it is too restricted in its detail. That is the observation which the poet, or the person of acute sensibility, will pass upon it without hesitation. It never cares to notice the detail which is contingent, outside of expectation and prediction, irrelevant to the pattern, and distracting. . . . We do not make sufficient contact with the world when we elect to be exclusively scientific, because that means blindness: that is the intellectual variety of anesthesia.¹

The failure of science, these writers believed, was apparent in its fragmentation of man's personality; in its misuse of nature; in its separation of man from his natural environment by the creation of an artificial habitat, the city; in its transformation of society into a group of specialists intent on materialistic gain through the effects of science (industry, big business, commercialism). It is the limitation of science, its incomplete representation of nature and of concrete experience to which the future Agrarians objected:

A good many authorities have now assured us that science is simply the strict intellectual technique by which we pursue any of our practical objectives. The scientific consideration is always the technical consideration which fixes narrowly on the road to some special goal. The perfect tribute to science is to say that, where it has elected to apply itself, it is efficient.²

That efficiency was not, and should not be, the consideration of man was stated explicitly by Ransom who pointed out that the needs "efficient science" can satisfy are the small, simple, material--hence comparatively insignificant; that efficiency as a value is unimpressive and meaningless in aesthetic appreciation and religious worship; and that because

¹P. 209.

²John Crowe Ransom, "Classical and Romantic," The Saturday Review of Literature, VI (September 14, 1929), 125.

the aesthetic experience differs in its nature from the scientific--it aims at no "productive accomplishment"; "very few of us would consent to abandon our minds wholly to the scientific regimen."¹ This concern enters even into literary criticism. Allen Tate, in one of his many book reviews for the Nation, concludes that The Pot of Earth by Archibald MacLeish is a failure as poetry because the myth on which it was based (the vegetation myth from The Golden Bough) "is for some reason buried too deep in the modern consciousness to be revived with a full sense of its implications: the experiential quality which Mr. MacLeish wished to bestow upon the remote symbol remains external, parallel to the symbol. The poem exhibits once more the dissociated contemporary mind."² In a review of Gorham Munson's Destinations: A Canvass of American Literature since 1900, Allen Tate raises questions about behaviorism as an approach to literary criticism. He finds the idea that "a scientific technique can be pursued outside of a measuring laboratory" a "scandalous supposition," and argues that "from the viewpoint of literary criticism all scientific methods, good or bad, are in the end irrelevant; for when method is taken out of the laboratory, it becomes literary and debased. . . . Mr. Munson's lack of discipline in ideas permits him to use the word science very much as the Christian Scientists do: he attempts to put into the term the idea of a way of living."³ Stark Young, in one of his New Republic essays on art, objects to the unsatisfactory criticism certain psychologists make of literature; he finds it so obvious as to be meaningless:

For the most part the psychologists I have known tend to approach art and the artist with a little air of "Hello!

¹ Ibid.

² "Toward Objectivity," review of three books of poems by Archibald MacLeish, The Nation, CXXIV (February 16, 1927), 185-86.

³ "A Defense of Order," The New Republic, LIV (May 16, 1928), 395.

How's mother? Have you a kitty?" They are anxious to discover and compliment in a piece of art what they call its good psychology. They draw art out by showing it generously how much all along it knew without knowing it. But if you use psychology in that sense, this specific praise of a piece of art becomes most general. It is like commending water for its wetness. . . . I sat thinking how, at the present stage of human progress the behaviorist's creed is only a matter of faith, a laboratory mysticism. . . . And I . . . am sure of this, that I should rather be analyzed by Shakespeare than by Simmons [a psychologist].¹

But perhaps the most interesting application of a critique of behaviorism to a literary work is found in Davidson's comments on A Farewell to Arms. Objecting to Hemingway's characterizations as colorless laboratory specimens, to the action as a mere tabulation of the "bare facts," and to his style as "wiped out . . . or . . . reduced to its lowest, most natural terms"--all the result (said Davidson) of Hemingway's unsuccessful attempt to combine science and art, Davidson concludes with a sweeping condemnation:

His novel is a splendid imitation, but only an imitation, of science. It is a hybrid beast, ill-begotten and sterile. . . . it can exist only as a marvelous monstrosity.

Note that he falls short even of science. Committed to the form of the novel, he must be selective where science is inclusive. [Hemingway produces something] exactly as marvelous and as convincing as a tragic sculpture done in butter.²

¹Encaustics (New York, 1926), pp. 62, 68.

²"Perfect Behavior," "Critic's Almanac," Nashville Tennessean, November 3, 1929. Apparently Tate objected to what appeared to be an extreme application of the anti-science bias, for Davidson wrote in a letter dated December 29, 1929: "I am afraid I sacrificed Hemingway (to some extent) in order to make a point against science. But I should add that I did this the more readily because I felt that he was exposed to criticism, at least to debate, on this particular point. I certainly respect him and I'm glad to have your opinion of him to take to heart. And with what you say about literary judgments in general, as not to be made from a sectional basis, but on the higher level, I'm in perfect agreement. I've felt for quite a while that I was in danger of losing balance and becoming merely a cantankerous localist, and your admonishment warms my conscience to its task."

Psychologist Lyle Lanier was at this time similarly dismayed by the effect of science on human values. In a letter to Allen Tate, written a year before the publication of the symposium, Lanier attributed the "evils" of science (physical science in particular) to unscrupulous individuals who manipulate others--by the application of the principles of science--for personal gain. Confused values result from such manipulation, Lanier maintained, and industrialism--the consequence of applied science--establishes its analogy in the social order: a dissociation of ideas in individuals, a loss of integrity of personality, a destruction of unity in individual and social action which had existed in the South in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Other members of the Agrarian symposium had also lamented the effects from applied science, and in scores of letters, critical articles, and poems appearing before 1930 attacks and oblique criticisms were directed against industrialism, specialization, urbanization, mechanization, and finance capitalism. At a time when he was close to a mental breakdown,¹ Fletcher wrote from England that he was desperately sick of modern "civilization" which he found characterized by a craze for machinery and a spirit of destruction. And in one of his most explicitly pro-Southern essays, John Crowe Ransom described industrialism as "an insidious spirit, . . . a menial, of almost miraculous cunning but no intelligence, . . . the wheel of Ixion . . . so ill adapted to the human physiology." Its effect, Ransom declared, was to accelerate the speed at which work is done, to tighten the tension of working hours so that any aesthetic enjoyment--either in

¹ Fletcher described his reaction in his autobiography: "After over a month of sleeplessness, . . . a month of restless desire to get away from London and to go somewhere else where the air would be cleaner, the sunlight purer, and the pressure of the mob less continuous, I utterly collapsed" (Life Is My Song, p. 318).

with elemental nature. And if even the city-folk are visited sometimes by an unaccountable nostalgia for the soil, and would like to return at week-ends to visit the old nature from which they have emancipated themselves, they do it far too patronizingly, they do not really recover the old attitude towards nature: they only take what may be called a picnic view of nature.¹

Modern society, continues Ransom, produces a city mind, "whose environment is artificial, and whose difficulties are imagined to be exclusively difficulties of personal relation."² The stone and steel city, as Davidson pictures it in his prologue to The Tall Men ("a dramatic visualization of a modern Southerner trapped in a distasteful urban environment"³), has destroyed all vitality:

. . . Where is the grass?
 Only the blind stone roots of the dull street
 And the steel thews of houses flourish here,
 And the baked curve of asphalt, smooth, trodden,
 Covers dead earth that once was quick with grass.
 Snuffling the ground with acrid breath the motors
 Fret the long street. Steel answers steel. Dust
 whirls.
 Skulls hurry past with the pale flesh yet clinging
 And a little hair. Fevered bones under clean
 Linen. Aimless knuckles of bones
 Within buttoned gloves waving to eyeless sockets:
 'Good day, old friend! Good day, my girl! Good-bye!
 So long, old man!'
 So long, forever so.
 Forever, night after night, to say good-bye
 Across the portals of an iron age
 And close the ivory gate with hopeless stare
 Down the long street and up and down again.⁴

And the city's machines are the murderers of humanity:

. . . I must remember
 Always to look before crossing. A man was killed
 On this historic corner the other day
 For failing to look while civilization crept
 Upon him with rubber wheels and a stench of gas.

¹ God Without Thunder, p. 125.

² Ibid., p. 149.

³ Donald Davidson, "Counterattack, 1930-1940," Southern Writers in the Modern World, p. 42.

⁴ "The Long Street," The Tall Men, pp. 2-3.

But here no Indians lurk. The motorman
 Knows perfectly what I want. The prisoned air,
 Steel, and electricity obey his wrist,
 And my soft proud body is borne on the smooth
 Parallel rails into a city hoarse
 With nine o'clock which brings the swivel-chair
 And to the hungry brain the pelt of typewriters.¹

In a somewhat less explicit and more successful poetic statement, Tate too reveals the reaction of a sensitive man to one of the most dehumanizing aspects of modern urban civilization: the subway. First published in 1927 while he was living in New York, the poem, ironically, is a sonnet--a form traditionally used for expressions of love; the language, like the subject and the poet's reaction to it, is harsh, technological; the images are sharp and dense. The sensitivity of a man, subjected daily to the thundering reverberations of hurtling steel, is dulled into a frozen madness:

Dark accurate plunger down the successive knell
 Of arch on arch, where ogives burst a red
 Reverberance of hail upon the dead
 Thunder like an exploding crucible!
 Harshly articulate, musical steel shell
 Of angry worship, hurled religiously
 Upon your business of humility
 Into the iron forestries of hell:
 Till broken in the shift of quieter
 Dense altitudes tangential of your steel,
 I am become geometries, and glut
 Expansions like a blind astronomer
 Dazed, while the worldless heavens bulge and reel
 In the cold revery of an idiot.²

In industrialism, these Southerners saw commercialization and the power of finance capitalism as serious threats to a creative, complete life. Fletcher in 1928 contrasted the artist's aims with the businessman's:

The creative artist, equipped as he is with the imagination that concerns itself primarily with elemental cause and effect, learns his difficult technique by mastering

¹"The Tall Men," ibid., p. 6.

²"The Subway," Poems, 1922-1947 (New York: 1948), p. 112.

the resources of his given material. The businessman denying as he does any underlying purpose in himself or others except the purpose of making profits applies to the whole of human life the prevailing standard of an easy and simple technique. And because this technique is simple and easily acquired, it becomes increasingly popular, so that the development of the arts and culture suffer from lack of those who will apply themselves.¹

Standardization, materialistic values supplanting the cultural, a degradation of morality--all were attributed to a society dependent on technology. Long before television antennae were planted in jungle-like profusion over the landscape, Davidson was deploring the effects of technology on American culture:

One is inclined to some pessimism, too, in view of the strong competition children's reading has to face with other diversions of a modern sort. Books seem hardly as precious to the child of the 1920's as they were to children of another day. The child of the 1920's goes to the movies--or is taken there by careless parents; he has automobiles, mechanical toys, supervised playground schemes, aesthetic dancing, swimming pools, gymnasiums, victrolas, radio, and Lord-knows-what to compete in interest with books. The city child at least has these: and as the country seems to be trying more and more under the zealous prodding of various experts to ape the city, we cannot expect the country child to escape altogether the frenzied whirl.²

Fletcher's pessimistic comparative study of Russia and the United States, The Two Frontiers, predicted the demise of Western civilization from America's "will to land" (or property) struggling against Russia's "will to power." In his critique of America, Fletcher found much to deplore:

This concentration on the technique of money-making has led to so much of America's standardization--and

¹The Two Frontiers: A Study in Historical Psychology (New York, 1930), p. 168. In his autobiography, Fletcher recounts some of the difficulties he had in finding a publisher for this study of the American and Russian problem on which he worked through 1928. See pp. 350-354 of the autobiography for an account of the thesis of the book, its reception by publishers and the public, and Fletcher's discouragement.

²"Children's Books, A Crippled Caravan," in "Critic's Almanac," The Nashville Tennessean, November 11, 1928, p. 7.

incidentally also to so much of its recent crime and moral callousness--is powerfully upheld by the present mechanical industrial epoch with its decline in handicrafts, and the opportunities it offers to any businessman to become the possessor, simply by buying a few specimens of the best that the art of the past has already produced. . . .¹

The modern commercial world of big business and high finance is represented by Donald Davidson with ironic scorn:

The modern brain, guarded not only by bone,
Afferent nerves, withering hair, and skin,
Requires the aid of a mystical apparatus
(Weights, levers, motor, steel rods, black boy)
And pyramiding dollars nicely invested
To float in boredom up to the cool fifth floor
And a tiled room. . . .

. . . The brain
Enters in state its private cave at evening,
Attended by groan of trucks and probable distant
Whirl of chartered dynamos and swish
Of prisoned waters pumped in tubes of lead;
Attended, too, by aluminum, potash,
Dreams of Henry Ford, alembics of Pasteur,
The ingenious soul of Edison, the thousand
Backs and hands of brown and yellow men
In Singapore or Ceylon; attended by
Elaborate giants brodered with ticker-tape
Involved above the smoke at Birmingham
Or perhaps at Pittsburgh; attended by bellowing
Of Kansas steers (they go in, animals;
They come out, packages); attended by
The harried eyes of men on subway trains
And pale children staring from tenement windows.
Assisted to a chair (Grand Rapids) by
Two slippers (from St. Louis) bites cigar
(Perhaps Havana) strikes a match (Bellefonte)
Unwrinkles trousers (Massachusetts) leafs
The New York Times (by U. S. Postal Service).²

On the North, the New South, and Progress

The source of all these undesirable manifestations of modern civilization could be located in both space and time--and, of course, these Southerners had no difficulty in finding

¹The Two Frontiers, p. 169.

²"Geography of the Brain," The Tall Men, pp. 28-29.

it: Northern industrialism and Eastern(or New York) capitalism were the Janus-faced enemy which had become increasingly powerful after its triumph in the Civil War; the insidious metamorphosis it was seeking to effect through its philosophy of progress had already taken hold of enthusiastic advocates of a New South, who were becoming convinced that the salvation for their homeland depended on a change in economy from agrarianism to industrialism. Long before there was any thought of a joint defense of the South, self-exiled John Gould Fletcher had expressed to a friend in 1917 his conviction that America would be better off run under an honest tyranny than with the fictitious liberty of millionaires and Wall-Street patriots. On a visit to the United States three years later, he records his impression:

When I arrived at New York, I suffered so badly from disillusionment that I was tempted to return by the next boat, even to travel by steerage, if necessary. New York is simply one vast orgy of spending-- . . . The war has not made the remotest effect--it has only increased the amount of money people have to spend, speeded up machinery everywhere, made everyone a cog in the vast money-making, soul-destroying grind. . . . Outwardly this country is prosperous to a degree never imagined before.

But inwardly this prosperity masks a profound and hopeless failure to get the most out of life. . . . American people are simply struggling on the edge of a vast abyss. I do not exxagerate [*sic*]. As the machine gets more and more perfect, life becomes more and more impossible. The machine must either be destroyed or life will cease to exist on this [planet?].¹

Allen Tate adopts an ironic tone in his bit of verse "On the Founder of the Industrial System in the United States":

In Webster and the town of Slatersville
 Samuel Slater, builder of Slater's Mill
 Owned the white hearts of men, but not a slave;

¹ Letter to John Cournos, June 1, 1920, on deposit at Harvard University. The remainder of the letter was not available. Quoted under copyright claim with the permission of Mrs. John Gould Fletcher.

Better that negroes, the well-fed heroic wave
 (Its echoes crashing in Atlanta still)
 Crashed against Lee at the Foot of Marye's Hill.¹

An anti-Northern bias in The Tall Men sometimes appears in explicit statement, sometimes in the tone. To represent a businessman, Davidson writes:

. . . a little man
Purrs in a patent tone of voice and a sleek
Copyrighted smile. He has a Northern way
 Of clipping his words, and with an inevitable curve
 Of an arm in a business suit reveals cigars
 In the tribal code. Then we are wreathed in smoke
 Like friends. . . .²

Describing an incident of the Civil War, Davidson calls attention to the "Yankeeness" of uncouth soldiers:

Then out of the back yard hedge a sudden row
 Of eight men in blue with Yankee feet
Violating the porch. Eight men with whiskey-breaths
Bashed into the silence across the carpets, poking
 Their long bayonets under the beds and the sofa.
 One with a stubby beard and woolly eyebrows
 Above a fat chin struck his Yankee bayonet
 Right at a little girl in a flannel nightgown,
 Laughing in a whiskey guttural.

"Shucks, I'm not afraid
 Of you . . . You're nothing but a damn Yankee!"³

Yet Northerners were not the only people against whom these Southerners aimed their attack. Just as reprehensible, if not more so, were the "New South" advocates, renegades and traitors to a tradition they should have sought to preserve rather than to belittle and destroy. These were the financiers, the brokers, the Chamber of Commerce men who sold their heritage for a mess of pottage. John Crowe Ransom, in April, 1928, commented on some of the lamentable changes coming to the South; only in non-urban areas, he felt, was there hope of preserving the South's historic identity:

¹ The Sewanee Review, XXXVIII (January, 1930), 49.

² "The Tall Men," p. 7. Italics supplied.

³ "The Sod of Battle-fields," The Tall Men, p. 21. Italics supplied.

The generous capitalists and charming missionary publicists from the other sections, and many of the Southern leaders themselves, seem indifferent to the tradition while they are trying to bring the South up to the rest of the country in material wealth. Progress and Service are "ramping high" in the South to-day. The urban South has about capitulated to these novelties. It is the village South and the rural South which supply the resistance and it is fortunate from my point of view that these represent a vast quantity of inertia.¹

Davidson, a few months later, expressed a similar anxiety; the key to the situation, he wrote, was in the hands of businessmen:

They are the lords and masters of the industrial expansion which is the chief fact about the modern South, and they wield the balance of power here as elsewhere. Even the rural population, long unmanageable, yields to the sway of dividends when Kraft cheese factories and water power syndicates invade the countryside.

.
The Southern businessmen . . . are ready to egg on their industrial revolution enthusiastically without ever counting the evils they may be dragging in with it, and without ever considering whether they are hurrying the South into an artificial prosperity.²

To the cry that the South must "progress" if it is to survive, they could be heard to reply, "Progress toward what?" The concept of "Progress" itself, examined and criticized by several of them, was always found wanting; Davidson asked,

Whose ideal of progress is the South to follow? The ideal of Mr. Mencken, if he has one? Of Mr. Oswald Garrison Villard? Of Mr. Walter Lippmann? . . . Of the Merchants and Manufacturers Association? . . . [The South] has long been conservative. It has kept its old ways of life intact. It has clung stubbornly to traditions which have given it definite character. In this time of change it can and ought to be deliberate. . . . What will happen . . . before the modern doctrine which insists that progress is novelty, is energy, is quantity?³

Ransom finds that the Gospel of Progress may involve its practitioners in "self-torture and suicide as much as in

¹"The South--Old or New?" p. 145.

²"First Fruits of Dayton, The Intellectual Evolution in Dixie," The Forum, LXXIX (June, 1928), 902-903.

³Ibid., p. 901.

enjoyment of life." It becomes mere change, and man is enslaved by a process that "never defines its ultimate objective but thrusts its victims at once into an infinite series."¹ "The concept of Progress," he wrote, "is the concept of man's increasing command, and eventually perfect command, over the forces of nature; a concept which enhances too readily our conceit, intoxicates us, and brutalizes our life."² The attack on progress was conducted on a less intellectual, more sentimental level as well. John Gould Fletcher prefaced his poem, appropriately titled "Song of Progress," with news item commentaries from the London G. K.'s Weekly and an American newspaper: "Something goes when every new machine comes in"; "One can love a horse; no one has ever loved his motor-car." These mottoes are followed by a kind of nostalgic lament for the passing of the age of the horse and an indignant depiction of an ugly machine world, for which man as creator will be punished:

The smith beats iron no more,
No more on sounding feet
Brave hoofs shall prance, but roar
Mad horns from street to street.

Loose bridles do not clink,
Loud whips no longer flash;
But, softly purring, slink
Swift wheels--until they crash.

.

And in some city street
Where multitudes meet to share
The sense of their defeat,
Men sometimes are aware--

Of eyes in a mask of bone,
Blinkered and downhung glance;
A cart-horse dumb, alone,
Kerb-derelict by chance.

.

Man's mightiest slave betrayed.
He who dragged Parthenons
Up to their billtops, made
Cavalry gleam as suns.

¹ "The South Defends Its Heritage," 110, 111.

² "The South--Old or New?" 141-142.

No prancing, snorting start,
 Nor ostler's whistle, nor
 The leisure of a cart,
 The smith beats iron no more.

And man, discrowned, shall go
 On a wider, lonelier path,
 Outspeeding all below,
 But he shall not miss God's wrath.¹

For these Southerners the concept of "Progress" for the South had value only if it was carefully limited, re-defined, and gradually and "naturally" assimilated with her traditions. To assume that mere change in the physical sense of living, or an increase in material possessions, or the accumulation of more scientific data constitutes an improvement in man's being is not to "progress" but to retrogress, in their view. Fletcher's re-definition focuses on man's intellect, not on his environment:

The only conception of human progress that is philosophically correct is not a conception of objective external progress at all: actually it is probable that we exercise no more control over nature--and this despite our machines and labour-saving inventions--than our most remote and savage ancestors exercised with their magic rituals to ensure a supply of game, or the earth's fertility. If we have progressed at all, it is solely in subjective curiosity, range of knowledge, and interest in our own destiny.²

Changes in living or in attitudes would not, however, be resisted by Southerners simply to maintain the status quo. The South, too, would accept progress, but of a special kind, to come in a distinctively appropriate way:

[It] ought to arrive naturally--and in accordance with Southern character, slowly--from within. General and universal items of progress, such as modern education, religious tolerance, political liberalism, should be sought as a matter of course, like improved sanitation and good farm machinery; and in these things the South would be foolish not to accept intelligent guidance wherever it can be found.⁷

¹ The Literary Digest, October 1st 1927, p. 36.

² The Two Frontiers, pp. 3-4.

³ Donald Davidson, "First Fruits of Dayton," p. 906.

But "Progress" was not to come or to be sought at the expense of the South's character. It was the threat to her "tradition of repose," her "noblesse oblige," her "ways of quiet, cultured life" that future Agrarians feared.

What will happen to that tradition before the modern doctrine which insists that progress is novelty, is energy, is quantity? Once we had romantic notions about the beauty and goodness of woman, and we even believed in God and good manners. Now we are offered biology, behaviorism, a handful of fossils, a tabloid newspaper. Mencken's essay on the liver as the seat of artistic inspiration, the vague, elusive thing called liberalism. Why should we not be slow to change? Why should we not search for certain accommodations? Surely it is the business of Southern leaders not merely to be progressive, but to study how to adapt the ways of progress to certain peculiarities of the Southern people which do not yet deserve to perish from the earth.¹

In John Crowe Ransom's delightfully ironic "Amphibious Crocodile," first published in The Fugitive, is an implicit critique of creatures who seek (quite contrary to their nature) culture, taste--in short, all the accoutrements of a civilized being. Like the nouveau riche whose wealth is acquired through the industrial process and who travels abroad, learns to drink the proper wines, dresses appropriately, visits the art museums and cathedrals, acquires the mannerisms of conversation and social life to make himself "cultured," the crocodile makes the grand tour, "weeps in Notre Dame with proper emotion," learns to identify places of importance to the wealthy tourist, and fights his own nature--unsuccessfully:

This is the Rive Gauche, this is the Hotel Crillon.
Where are the brave poilus? They are slain by his French.
And suddenly he cries, I want to see a trench!
Up in the North eventually he finds one

Which is all green slime and water; whereupon lewd
Nostalgic tremors assail him; with strangled oaths
He flees; he would be kicking off his clothes
And reverting to his pre-Christian mother's nude.

He travels to England and sees Westminster and Fleet Street,
expects to be presented to the King, tries to ride the hounds

¹ Ibid., p. 902.

on a week-end party, drinks a Scotch and soda with the Balliol men,

But when old Crocodile rises to speak at the Union
He is too miserably conscious of his bunion
And toes too large for the aesthetic regimen.

It is too too possible he has wandered far
From the simple center of his rugged nature.
I wonder, says he, if I am the sort of creature
To live by travel, projects, affaires de coeur? . . .

Soberly Crocodile sips of the Eucharist
But as he meditates the obscene complexes
And infinite involutions of the sexes,
Crocodile sets up for a psychoanalyst.

Great is his learning. He learns to discuss
Pure being, both the Who's Who and the What's What.
Affirms that A is A, refutes that B is not.
This is a clean life without mud and muss.

But who would ever have thought it took such strength
To whittle the tree of being to a point
While the deep-sea urge cries Largo, and every joint
Tingles with gross desire of lying at length?

So "old Robert Crocodile" packs up and goes back to his
natural element, the water.

Crocodile hangs his pretty clothes on a limb
And lies with his fathers, and with his mothers too,
And his brothers and sisters as it seems right to do;
The family religion is good enough for him.

Full length he lies and goes as water goes,
He weeps for joy and welters in the flood,
Floating he lies extended many a rood
And quite invisible but for the end of his nose.¹

On Southern Culture, Art, and Aesthetics

As poet, Ransom developed a "positive" position in a gently ironic, almost aloof, yet somewhat engaged emotional involvement with his heritage. A poem like "Dead Boy," where he juxtaposes concrete details in a fine balance, reveals not only his identification with, and love for, the South but also his recognition of both its decay and its values:

¹Two Gentlemen in Bonds, pp. 56-58; first published December, 1925, in The Fugitive, IV, 121-23.

The little cousin is dead, by foul subtraction,
 A green bough from Virginia's aged tree,
 And neither the county kin love the transaction,
 Nor none of the world of outer dark, like me.

He was not a beautiful boy, nor good, nor clever,
 A black cloud full of storms too hot for keeping,
 A sword beneath his mother's heart--yet never
 Woman wept her babe as this is weeping.

A pig with a pasty face, I had always said,
 Squealing for cookies, kinned by pure pretense
 With a noble house. But the little man quite dead,
 I can see the forebears' antique lineaments.

The elder men have strode by the box of death
 To the wide flag porch, and muttering low send round
 The bruit of the day. O friendly waste of breath!
 Their hearts are hurt with a deep dynastic wound.

He was pale and little, the foolish neighbors say;
 The first-fruits, saith the preacher, the Lord hath taken;
 But this was the old tree's late branch wrenched away,
 Aggrieving the sapless limbs, the shorn and shaken.¹

On the surface "Dead Boy" is merely an observation from an outsider (not "of the county kin," but "of the world of outer dark") on the death of a boy (declined from the nobility of his forebears) who represents the end, the last hope of an old Virginia family. The basic metaphor--"a green bough from Virginia's aged tree"--enables the poet to reveal without sentimentality or obviousness, his own genuine regret at the loss, even though the "cousin" was "pale and little," not good, nor beautiful, nor clever, "a pig with a pasty face . . . squealing for cookies." His death is a kind of mechanical process, a "transaction" (he is "dead, by foul subtraction"), but he was "the old tree's late branch wrenched away,/Aggrieving the sapless limbs, the shorn and shaken."²

¹Two Gentlemen in Bonds, p. 34. This version differs slightly in style from both earlier and later versions. First published in the April, 1924, Sewanee Review, "Dead Boy" was noticeably improved in each succeeding form. For instance, line 3 of stanza 1 originally read: "And the county kin sit glowering on the transaction." In the final form, published in Selected Poems (1945), it appeared: "And none of the county kin like the transaction," which is metrically and stylistically superior to the 1927 version above.

²Allen Tate's Nation review of Two Gentlemen in Bonds,

John Gould Fletcher, too, expressed such an attitude of ambivalence. He also recognized the difficulty of fighting for the aristocratic traditions of the South whose enemies were not only chaotic industrial forces but uncritical Southerners. His position, however, was more explicitly "Old South" than that of the former Fugitives. In a mood of militant despair, he wrote Tate:

I often think of you and of the other Southern writers who are trying to say something. Ours is really a desperate cause; we are up against not only the half-baked radicals

in which "Dead Boy" appeared, interpreted the nature and value of Ransom's "Southernism": "Mr. Ransom is the last pure manifestation of the culture of the eighteenth century South; the moral issues which emerge transfigured in his poetry are the moral issues of his section, class, culture, referred to their simple fundamental properties." Discovering in Ransom's poems two qualities which he felt particularly connected him with Southern culture--rationalism ("in the sense of the humane tradition . . . lying at the very core of the old Southern order") and the code of noblesse oblige. The rationalism, said Tate, "stiffens his poetry with an irony and lucidity, and a subtlety . . ."; it serves as "the evaluating instrument of the code of honor. . . ."; "it is the weapon of casuistry . . .". In poems like "Dead Boy," Tate continued, "Ransom can render a beautiful commentary upon his tragic personal vision because he accepts the code within which the characters struggle; elsewhere, where he cannot accept their code, as in *Amphibious Crocodile*, he pours out the meager yet venomous acid of his satire." ["The Eighteenth Century South," Nation, CXXIV (March 30, 1927), 346.]

In a letter to Tate, Ransom commented on the review, revealing that although his concern in his art was still primarily aesthetic not propagandistic, the relation of his work to his heritage was implicit and integral: "About Rationalism and Noblesse Oblige. You do me the honor to let me be a mouthpiece for a very noble historic culture. And this is perhaps the accidental and perhaps the questionable feature of your interpretation. . . . What is important . . . was that my stuff presents the dualistic philosophy of an assertive element versus an element of withdrawal and Respect. . . . My objects . . . might be something like the following. . . .: (1) I want to find the Experience that is in the common actuals; (2) I want this experience to carry (by association of course) the dearest possible values to which we have attached ourselves; (3) I want to face the disintegration or nullification of these values as calmly and religiously as possible." [Wednesday [dated "1926--? Spring" by Tate. In view of the explicit reference to Tate's review, the year must be 1927.]

. . . who do not see in defending their brand of radicalism they are defending vulgarity, but also we are up against the sheer stupidity of our own people. . . . The slave civilization of the South was better than the industrial chaos of the North . . . I am not a radical, nor a conservative, but I am an anti-industrialist to the marrow of my bones and this industrial age makes me more radical than the radicals. In any other age than this, I should be a conservative, as every artist must be who has some respect for things of beauty and nobility. We of the south fought against the factory to keep the slave-barrack alive and we were right. . . .

[August 10, 1927]

CHAPTER III

THE EMERGENCE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF AGRARIANISM

The Reinterpretation of Provincialism

As a result of the critical, "spontaneous self-examination" which Tate had found lacking in the South in 1925 and which the three former Fugitives had begun to undertake individually in 1925-1927, they began to write strongly partisan pro-Southern articles. A concerted plan of defense had not yet emerged, but it was apparent that all three were enthusiastically exchanging ideas on what to do for their cause. And their interests were expanding beyond aesthetics and poetry to encompass social, historical, economic, political, and religious aspects of Southern culture. The outer world was impinging upon their academic and artistic one. Davidson, for example, was contemplating "a book on Southern literature, chiefly contemporary, but viewed against the background of the past. . . . It is my intention," he wrote Tate, "to broaden considerably the thesis I evolved in my Saturday Review article,¹ and to apply it in such a way that my study may prove to be of general critical values,--not a mere provincial business, but a compendium, not an opportunist survey, but an organic study which will involve historical and even social considerations."² In less than three months, he had moved with Tate from a focus on literature and the arts to a more inclusive area:

¹"The Artist as Southerner. . . " see p. 46 ff. above.

²Letter to Allen Tate, December 27, 1926.

You know that I'm with you on the anti-New South stuff. . . . I feel so strongly on these points that I can hardly trust myself to write. . . . But know this: though I trust my sense of humor and balance. . . , I have fully decided that my America is here or nowhere. I am thinking that I may make that projected new book (for which I have been reading) not so much a "history" of Southern literature, as a study of the Southern tradition--where it is, where it isn't, what and how and so on. And I have been going through a spiritual "secession,"¹ in fact, ever since that Saturday Review article which made me examine my own mind. [March 4, 1927]

By June Davidson was well launched on his reading: "I am plunging ahead into Southern tradition--reading Wm. Wirt, Byrd of Westover, Kennedy, John P. Kennedy (damned Whig traitor he turns out to be), and am enjoying myself pretty well."² The result, embodying his personal reactions to the history of his region as well as his family, was The Tall Men, published late in 1927.³ Provincialism--which he had been criticizing in Southern art--was re-defined, re-interpreted, re-affirmed on a broader basis:

Provincialism, in the favorable sense I am thinking about, is a philosophy of life that begins with one's own roof-tree. It is rebellious against the modern principle of standardization, as it is carried over from science and machinery into habits of thought.

¹The direction and nature of Davidson's "secession" are suggested in a column he wrote for the Nashville Tennessean late in 1926: ". . . let [the Tennessee artist] also not be afraid to be provincial, for though provincialism in the narrow sense is to be condemned, it is also a sin to lose all contact with one's own character and become a thing neither hot nor cold. . . . The very language of these hills, the gestures of Tennessee hands, the look of Tennessee fields were never anywhere else on earth and cry aloud to be spoken." ["Spyglass," December 5, 1926.]

²Letter to Allen Tate, June 22, 1927.

³Stephen Vincent Benét in a review published in the December 10, 1927, Saturday Review of Literature, noted: "Mr. Davidson has built up, with a very definite fire and skill, a people, a State, a passage of time and a man--the Tennessee of the hunters and the Tennessee of the Buick drivers." See pp. 57-58 above for Davidson's statement of purpose and the scope of the poem.

It believes in unity as a principle of convenience and beauty, but not in uniformity. It knows that harmony comes not from exact correspondence but from a certain amount of diversity. It begins its reasoning with the old and established things, wherever they are the marks of a native character and tradition that seem to have contributed something valuable and interesting to life. . . .¹

Having arrived at the realization that provincialism should be defended rather than attacked, these critics chose to implement their convictions with an agrarian program. Their goal was a meaningful life for all men; their means, the establishment of a "good" society--in character aristocratic, stable, and traditional; their aim, after insuring the necessities of life, to make it possible for men to enjoy living aesthetically, to be more wholly human than mechanical, to be more cultured. As men of letters, they often found clustered within a single event or object a representation of a philosophical point of view. Such a symbol was the University of Virginia for Stark Young, who saw in Jefferson's architectural achievement the values most worthy of preservation and most threatened and denigrated by the "American" way of life:

I find myself wondering now, as I wondered even there in the beauty and unity of its spell, what chance such a place can have in our American world today, and why more hubbub and publicity has not arisen popularly to spread its atmosphere and myth. I fancy the dice are loaded against it. It is too aristocratic to be easy, too formally exacting to be democratic and casual, too intellectual to be general. . . . I find it hard to think of college hymns and college spirit flourishing fervently on those Virginia grounds, or to picture class reunions, when the old students return for a moment's flutter of the intellectual wings before they relapse again into their practical barnyards. . . . Such a place as this suggests traditions and inherited ideas . . . eloquence, rhetoric, or even, at the worst, bombast, but not bourgeois cant. It suggests for its teaching none of your insistent penetration and spiritual, philosophical meddling with young men's souls and states, but a habit of allowing men to ripen of themselves and the vitality of their characters to achieve the growth implicit in it. Its origin was

¹"The Critic's Almanac," Nashville Tennessean, April 22, 1928. He was expressing the same view of provincialism in other articles, for instance, in "First Fruits of Dayton."

eighteenth century, free in the sense Jefferson understood, aristocratic in his sense; . . . There must be less of the smell of Calvinistic brimstone . . . and more of the old fragrance of civilization, which arose from public graces and a desire for those forms of moral beauty in which men may live best, not to themselves but in some sort of society together.¹

Individually, then, the future contributors to I'll Take My Stand turned to provincialism as a foundation for a structure of thought into which issues outside as well as within their special fields of interest could be fitted-- issues which were to become topics in the symposium: aesthetic theory and the relation of art to culture, Southern history, education, religion, Southern economy, race, and political theory.²

Aesthetic Theory, Society, and the Role of the Artist

It is apparent that the devotion of the literary members of the group to agrarianism was to a significant degree the result of their genuine concern for the position of the artist in an industrializing society. In part, the bitter, unrestrained attacks through the 1920's on the South as narrow, provincial, and backward³ led Tate, Ransom, and Davidson in particular to their observations about the work of art qua art

¹"Virginia Reflections," New Republic, LI (June 15, 1927), 101.

²The order in which these topics are listed for discussion represents their appearance in the symposium. Although the last subject, political theory, is not treated separately in a single essay, it is implicit in almost every contribution. Apparent omissions of subjects (Ransom's discussion of the fundamental conflict between agrarianism and industrialism, Lanier's critique of the philosophy of progress, Wade and Kline's biographical sketches of Southern figures, and Young's defense of Southern tradition) do not really constitute omissions; these themes and topics have already been considered to some extent in discussions of the personal heritage, the experiences, and the writings of the contributors and will be treated more extensively in Appendix B.

³See pp. 200 ff. for discussion..

to include a concern not only for the literary situation but for the whole society in which the artist had to live and create. In part, too, the Fugitives-turning-Agrarians were depressed and pessimistic about the South's failure to encourage artists. They lamented the "local and sentimental point of view," the dwelling upon the lost cause. Tate, writing for the Nation in 1925, spoke of this persistent attitude as the "last days of the charming lady," and declared: "The South could not afford to look at itself critically; and it is a commonplace in the history of intelligence that spontaneous self-examination . . . is the initial moral attitude which must preface the exacting business of beautiful letters."¹ Less than a year later Donald Davidson published an article similarly regretting that the modern Southern artist was being treated as an alien in his own land. The writer's position, said Davidson, is incongruous and his dilemma--how to be genuinely Southern and yet not to be narrowly provincial--leads him either to escape into a remote past, to protest present conditions, or to adapt himself to "progress" in the New South. The artist of integrity hesitates to use his "tradition already sicklied over with sentimentalism; . . . the gallantries of the Lost Cause, the legends of a gracious aristocracy, the stalwart traditions of Southern history--these he may admire, but they come to him mouthed over and cheapened." But even less readily, Davidson believed, can the Southern writer "digest the victorious cries of civic boosters." He must, instead, become somehow truly "autochthonous" if he would be truly Southern. And how are autochthonous writers recognized? They are of the same time and place as their generation and section, yet they are not detached from fundamental thoughts and feelings. While they see local materials as "fresh and immediate themes," they give them a universal, not merely a provincial character. "They can speak in their own character and still retain the flavor of the soil that produced them."²

¹"Last Days of the Charming Lady," 485. For a fuller discussion of Tate's views at the time, see n. 1, p. 37 above, and p. 44 ff.

²"The Artist as Southerner," 782.

This ambivalent attitude toward the South was also Ransom's. Gently chiding Tate, who had written from New York lamenting the evil days on which the poet had fallen, Ransom observed, on the one hand, that human experience--the poet's material--is fundamentally the same regardless of time and place; on the other hand, he asserted, the poet can best flourish in a provincial setting. The time in which they were living, wrote Ransom, probably did not "have the distinction of being located near the nadir of human history," nor was the "fundamental life-history of individuals" different in different periods. For him poetical subjects were matters of "peculiarly individual interests." Time and space made no real difference. Yet, he acknowledged, he found himself "particularly taken with the idea that provincial life is the best"; "only in the city, where for the most part the disaffected go," did he find "that scorn for the Main Streeters which seems just now such a blemish on our productive literary arts." Concerned about Tate's "merely critical state"--an imperfect poetic state wherein the artist has not fulfilled his obligation--which is to find his positive experience, Ransom warned that such a position was "just a half-way house, just the approach to the creative work of art."¹

At the 1956 gathering of the Fugitives, where an attempt was made to reconstruct their evolution into Agrarians, Davidson observed that his defense of poetry included "necessarily the attack of the poets on the society which had gotten itself into difficulties, not merely because it was hostile to poets, but because it was disintegrating, itself." There was no alternative: the poets had to "make an attack on society. . . . Every defense of poetry . . . , no matter what the form--whether in one of John's most aesthetic essays, or in some of the Agrarian essays in a more direct form-- . . . is always the intuitive approach to the evils of society."² In the

¹Letter, September 13 (1926--dated by Allen Tate).

²Donald Davidson, Fugitives' Reunion, pp. 27-28.

middle and late 1920's, that society was both the industrial North and New South and the sentimental, a-literary traditional South.

Before the publication of the symposium, critical articles by Allen Tate, who reviewed frequently in The New Republic and The Nation from 1925 through 1930, reveal a progression from judging art sui generis to a consideration of its relevance to and effect from the society for which it was created. In October, 1925, Tate's judgment of a book of poems by AE was purely literary: thought overshadows emotion, he pointed out, and the poetry which should be a self-contained realization of the emotion, fails:

The power of his emotion everywhere overflows the meagre symbolic equipment; it isn't concentrated, like Blake's, wholly in the symbols at his disposal; his poetry is thus in the end a cold experience. The emotion scatters and only a contemplation remains. The tremendous conviction that has marked AE's poetry from the beginning has not had the justice done it of a perfectly realized art. He is very serious about his conviction; he is indifferent to the seriousness of his poetry.¹

In a review written late in 1926 Tate labeled as "vulgar thinking" and "a serious threat to the immediate future of literature" the view that society is the cause and can wholly explain the literature of a particular time.² But early in 1927 a shift in emphasis became apparent. Tate began to relate poetry and criticism to the society in which they were produced, to offer a contrast between a past with an organic culture, reflected in its literature, and a present dissociation. Poetry, he wrote, might again become a major art, as in the Elizabethan age when it was "the index to culture as a whole, its apex and microcosm." It alone "gathers up the discrete departments of the intellect into a humane and living whole."³

¹"Rhetoric, Mysticism and Poetry," The New Republic, XLIV (October 14, 1925), 209.

²"The Holy War," Nation, CXXIII (December 29, 1926), 694.

³"Metaphysical Acrobatics," New Republic, L (March 9, 1927), 76.

By 1929 the "purity" of the poet's interest in art was of less importance to Tate than the fact that a genuine poet must write from his roots; he cannot intellectually construct a "national myth" and expect it to be good poetry. The hope for modern poetry lies in his conscious recognition of his own provincialism. What faults modern poets are charged with are clearly attributable to his society, suggested Tate. Poetry for him is no longer inviolate, and the poet now is clearly part of his milieu:

The rootless character of contemporary life explains the tenuous substance which informs the mind of the contemporary poet. It explains the obscurity and difficulty of his verse. There are no fixed points in the firmament, no settled ideas of conscience, which he can call upon to simplify his speech. He lacks ideas but it is not his business to make them; it is his business to put them to use.¹

By 1930 Tate was basing his criticism more explicitly on assumptions quite different from those he held in 1925. From an aesthetic formalist position, he had moved to include the cultural milieu. S. Foster Damon's biography of the Georgia poet, Thomas Holly Chivers, contemporary and alleged plagiarist of Poe, was found wanting because it failed to consider adequately important external elements:

If there is any fault to find with [this biography], it is the thinness of its social background; the author knows little and cares less about the society that produced Chivers; his graciously patronizing attitude towards it better becomes an Eastern contemporary of his subject than a modern scholar enlightened supposedly by a new generation of historians.²

Even where Tate continued to evaluate a poem or a novel primarily on its form and technique--as he did in a discussion of a work by James Branch Cabell--it is a critique placed in a philosophical and historical perspective. Cabell had written

¹"American Poetry since 1920," Bookman, LXVIII (January, 1929), 508.

²"The Lost Poet of Georgia," New Republic, LXIII (July 23, 1930), 294-95.

a book, Tate asserted, that failed to present a philosophically sympathetic thesis. Representing what psychologists call "dissociation," the work, Tate felt, had not come to terms with the Southern attitude toward defeat, had left uncertain what had been defeated, and had presented instead the Southern psychology as mere doctrine. Historically, said Tate, though the thesis is more appealing, Cabell finally misses the important relationship of his created object of worship--Poictesme--to the South. The danger, Tate implied, lies in the fact that this fictive creation permitted Cabell to apologize for the psychology of defeat rather than to vindicate it. The partisan bias of Tate is apparent:

. . . it seems that Poictesme is not a way of escape into the Old South, but an escape from it into a world that Mr. Cabell both dislikes and needs; the fantasy of Poictesme will let one accept this world and go on believing that one has not accepted it.

For this reason his long critical work, "Beyond Life," acquires a valuable historical interest. It is the attempt of a man to get out of a dilemma without facing it. Mr. Cabell has not been able to get down to the exact nature of his loss in the Civil War--the capital problem of his generation in the South; and, with a different emphasis, the capital problem of ours. For the nature of this loss should be one side of the dilemma opposed to the industrialist-realist-romantic enemy. Mr. Cabell has done some violence to philosophic thought by opposing the realist to the romantic in order to conquer the dilemma without facing it. Romanticism and realism are twins; and Mr. Cabell's solution to his dilemma, because it is false, was rhetorical and Pyrrhic; it left the real difficulty untouched.¹

The character of the marked change in Tate's reviews was noted with approval by Davidson; considering this analysis of Cabell one of Tate's best (apparently the article had been sent to him in Nashville before it was published), Davidson observed:

Cabell has not been approached with the point of view that throws him in a proper light--five years ago your point of view would have been simply literary, wouldn't

¹"Mr. Cabell's Farewell," New Republic, LXI (January 8, 1930), 202.

it? What a difference it makes to see him in a total perspective. Here, I should say, sectionalism has been decidedly to your advantage. . . . I think it is very important that Cabell should be handled as you have handled him. You've given me much food for thought.
[December 29, 1929]

Ransom's view of the artist's function in society underwent a similar shift in emphasis--from an interest in what constitutes poetic expression for the poet qua poet to a conviction that a work of art in its very nature might be the means of resisting the dehumanizing effects of modern civilization. As a Fugitive, Ransom had treated poetry primarily in terms of personal expression. If the poet, he said, tries to write for the widest possible audience, he would find himself generalizing and simplifying his experience to triteness and stultification. For Ransom, poetry then was most inclusive when it "evoke[s] in our memories the deepest previous experience," when "its reference is always free and personal, and never fixed and ideal." His answer to what constitutes good and bad poetry is "pragmatic":

Good poetry is that which fits our own passionate history, and expresses that which needs expression from our private deeps. . . . [Bad poetry] is the poetry we do not like because it does not illuminate our private darkness and which therefore we call unintelligible or vain and trifling. . . . to dogmatize our own poetic likings into a standard for others is to subtract fatally from the conception of poetry as a spontaneous and expressive art.¹

Some four years later Ransom's "idea of aesthetic essence" was placed in a broader context, with a different focus--from personal considerations to society's needs--and in more polemical language: "The works of art are psychic exercises which are just so many rebellions against science."² Together

¹"A Doctrine of Relativity," The Fugitive, IV (September, 1925), 93. Emphasis supplied.

²The contrast in Ransom's thinking about science and its relation to the artist is as striking for its movement in the opposite direction as is his change in thought about the artist and his relation to society. By 1930 his comments revealed a conviction that science in general was, by its

they constitute the formidable reproach which a disillusioned humanity has had to cast at the scientific way of life. . . . that is the thesis which . . . occurs to me as . . . eminently reasonable, and easy to maintain."¹

The fact that both Ransom and Tate arrived at a view that the poet cannot be content to ignore or stand apart from his society does not imply that these poet-critics shared the same aesthetic assumptions along the way. On the contrary, while Tate, at one point, argued for a Poetic Absolute (expressed, curiously, in an algebraic metaphor), Ransom maintained a dualistic position. Tate sought to support, with his aesthetic theory, the view that Poetry is an inviolate, unique kind of experience and knowledge; Ransom, on the other hand, saw poetry as one expression of relationship to human experience.² The involutions of this critical separation

very nature, hostile to the interests and values of the artist. Yet in the context of the social sciences, while rejecting the sociologist's compilation technique manifest in the "Main Street school of fiction," he found in 1924 that Freudian psychology might have much to offer the writer. Access to psychoanalysis, he wrote, will make truth and depth "readier to the hands of the writers"; it will show "how much more epic and fascinating . . . the daily business of being human" is. ["Freud and Literature," Saturday Review of Literature, I (October 4, 1924), 161.]

¹"Classical and Romantic," 125.

²In an article, "Poetry and the Absolute," appearing early in 1927, but written in the winter of 1925-1926, Tate expressed his thesis as an algebraic equation: $A = ax^2 + bx + c$; the poetic absolute (A) consisted of the constants of the poem (a, b, and c--the subject matter) made distinctive by the poet's personal equipment (x--the variable). Thus, this absolute, which Tate defined as "the signification of experiences," "creativity [which is] the unique quality of all good art," supported his view that the poet as poet must function apart from his environment if art is to be justified.

"The absolutism inheres between the poet and his poetry, between the reader and the poetry, not between them and the world. This immediately explains the necessity for art. For if the irresistible need of the mind for absolute experience could be adequately satisfied in ordinary cursory experience, this latter experience classified into moral states and defined intellectually in an absolute metaphysics

would be interesting to follow, but further discussion of aesthetic theory is more properly the concern of the literary critic or philosopher. Perhaps it is sufficient at this point to have noted the nature of the disagreement--a split which, nevertheless, did not preclude a later shared conviction that the establishment of a society in which art could flourish would serve to resist the tendencies of popular culture.

It is probably less important, then, to describe in detail the development of the change or to suggest "causes" than to recognize the nature and degree of unanimity the future Agrarians reached in their views on the relation of

would be sufficient." [Sewanee Review, XXXV (January, 1927), 49.]

Ransom, however, found Tate's monistic position inconsistent, not only with other assertions Tate had made elsewhere, but also with the nature of poetic and human experience. For him a dualism was necessary to permit the representation of the infinite varieties of relations possible to poetry; to Tate he wrote: "I liked tremendously your Poetic Absolute. . . . At the same time I can see that it is two years behind your present thinking. You can't make your formula out of an unqualified Absolute--your recent formulas have been more dualistic. And even in your article you quote Donne's poem ["The Funeral"] to show how readily his items link up with the conceptual world, but proceed straightway to claim that in spite of its origin it is an Absolute, and out of all relations. Of course, it doesn't stop being related; . . . all quality is a relation; the unpredictable and absolute property of the thing being simply that it can never be confined to a single relation or group of relations but always has novel relations to give out. . . . your insistence that we mustn't psychologize the finished poem, but treat it as ultimate, finished, absolute is a species of idolatry. The poem is hot not cold, living not dead, a source of constant fresh experience, not a page that has been turned. I don't insist on a genetic account of the poem at all, merely an account of it which considers it as a human experience. . . . Call it an unpredictable source of energy; but this energy is of two components: the container, which is the relative and quantitative and the movement which is free and contingent and qualitative. As fast as you define poetry as the Absolute, you must amend it by saying what kind of absolute; and that is, namely, an absolute which consists of infinite relativity." [Letter, April 3, 13, dated 1926 by Tate.] For a fuller treatment of the differences in the critical positions of Ransom and Tate, see John Bradbury, The Fugitives, especially pp. 23-25, and chapters iv, viii, and ix.

art to society. There were at least two: first, and most obvious, that art or an aesthetic life is threatened by our modern, technologically oriented society with its dependence on abstraction and its assumption that the satisfaction of material needs is the most important value; second, that the artist, if he is to function in such a world, cannot ignore his environment; he must somehow oppose its abstractions and formulas with the particularities and concrete experiences of his own world. This was, for them, the uniqueness, the power, and the value of art. And it was their concern to preserve this most "human" aspect of life that led to a shift from a primarily literary interest in poetry to a reckoning with the socio-economic milieu in which poetry was produced. Their motivation, as John Bradbury aptly characterized it, was an effort to create conditions for an integrated life in which poetry might naturally assume a vital role. The impulse originated in "an aesthetic dilemma, brought on, as theory had it, by a social situation, but it demanded a philosophic solution which would embrace both aesthetic and social aspects of the problem."¹

As men of letters, their attack on science was necessarily predicated on a fundamental dualism. In its ramifications the conflict between art and science was seen in various guises: the artist vs. the critic, the artist vs. his society, an emotionally realized poetry vs. an intellectual poetry, the concreteness of the experienced vs. the abstractness of the theoretical. Such dichotomizations, they charged, are the result of our modern, technological civilization.

The difference between the interests of the artist and the critic, and by implication between the methods they used, served as the foundation for Davidson's analysis of how a critic might benefit if he were to cast himself in the role of the artist. His prize-winning literary essay written for a Saturday Review of Literature competition in 1925 is based

¹The Fugitives, p. 88.

on the assumption that there is a fundamental conflict between the artist and critic--a conflict analogous to that between art and science:

Given the frustum of the pyramid, the mathematician can construct the remainder. This action is by grace of formulas for which the scientist's respect and the artist's dread are equally pardonable. The latter, either because vagueness is a part of his stock-in-trade or because he dislikes to lay bare his own secrets, will be inclined to decry an effort to complete a masterpiece by proxy. "Where is Art," he may say, "in this synthetic business? Your probes and yardsticks cannot touch the ultimate mystery of this fragment. Therefore let it stand, with other noble unfinished pieces whose missing parts are as unpredictable as the destiny of man."

"The critic will not have it so. His temper is that of the scientist, believing only when he has weighed and tested, digesting all things minutely, surrendering only to analytical enthusiasms." The unfinished work provokes him because it offers a problem. When the first glow of reading is gone, he will pause to wonder what the end of this dream-panorama would have been. Nor will he be content with wondering, but will find himself presently on paths of general speculation. . . .¹

The effects of this basic conflict between art and science were presented in another guise: a lament that the times were out of joint for the modern writer. As a poet-critic Tate regretted that his civilization had no system of myths which he could assume his audience would know or understand. Thus, argued Tate, if the modern poet must first create a mythological structure, he must shift his attention from the form and expression in the poem to the philosophical system. And if one is a critic in the twentieth century, he attempts in this dilemma to fit the work of art to the theory he has evolved. The result is dichotomization, fragmentation; neither the poet nor the critic can function as a whole man, and "science" is at fault: the poet cannot give proper attention to his expression; the critic becomes preoccupied with

¹"Essays on Conrad's 'Suspense,'" Saturday Review of Literature, II (November 21, 1925), 315. The problem set for the competition was to suggest an ending for Conrad's incomplete novel, Suspense, and then to justify the ending in an essay. Davidson's entry was awarded fourth prize.

matters other than the literary quality of the work. In contrast, Tate asserted, the poet of Dante's time had certain obvious advantages--because he lived in an organic society with a "given" scheme he could focus on method; but the modern poet "has to construct, besides his personal vision, the scheme itself." The fault is the direction man has been forced to take since the Enlightenment--he finds himself preoccupied with "the scientific fact, to the neglect of the human attitude." The effects on both artists and critics have been unfortunate:

. . . the most conspicuous result of the historical method has been to disqualify many of our best minds for the traditional functions of criticism. Writers are examined, not for their artistic effectiveness, but for their origin, and, still more perniciously, for the assumed pathology of their ideas. What is looked for is found. . . . The split mind of the poet meets its counterpart in the disfranchised intellect of the critic. We can no longer evaluate the poetry of Dante simply because we no longer believe the doctrine of the Trinity. There is a certain meanness of balance in the contemporary mind.¹

Behind the scientific method, which Tate criticizes in its application, "lurks the obsession for scientific fact"--an obsession which makes certain critics intolerant of writers who do not represent their view of "the order of nature." At this point Tate separated the theory and the application of science: "I intend no disrespect to science, but a great deal to its less rational, its merely literary practitioners, and to its avowed popularizers, who naively expound a lop-sided metaphysic. . . ." ²

¹"The Revolt Against Literature," New Republic, XLIX (February 9, 1927), 330.

²Ibid. John Bradbury in The Fugitives describes Tate's position in 1927 as embodied in a "purely formal aesthetic creed," to be represented in a new school of critics "attending exclusively to the properties of poetry as a fine art." Nevertheless, in this same New Republic review, Tate regretted the lack of "an integrating philosophy"--a position which logically contradicted the soundness of his attempt to eliminate "moral, sociological, philosophical, and historical criteria." The dilemma, Bradbury asserts, was resolved in the "indeterminateness of psychological knowledge" which gave them [Tate and Ransom] "a refuge against positivism broad enough to admit the logic of the illogical demanded by art" [p. 56]. However, an examination of their writing in the

Robert Penn Warren's view at this time seems to have been closer to Tate's than to Ransom's, but all agreed that industrialization and the philosophy it represented had destroyed that most desirable literary milieu in which an artist can function--a society with a living myth. After pointing out as most important in Hawthorne the peculiar relation he bore to Puritanism "before its energies became vulgarized in industrialism," Warren proceeded to contrast this past with the contemporary New England society which such artists as Robinson and Frost have had to use:

Hawthorne could still comprehend a system, a narrow and comfortless dogma, perhaps, but yet one by which the perceptions of an artist might be oriented and which could provide the premises of a certain concept of tragedy. It was a "myth" [that] was at one time susceptible to a deep psychological interpretation. Hawthorne, coming at that time, had the strength to bend its rigor to an aesthetic purpose. After Emerson had done his work, any tragic possibilities inherent in that culture were dissipated. In New England Edward Arlington Robinson now looks backward, but his impulse is frustrated; he ends by being merely puzzled. He has achieved an idiom and a method, but no larger terms into which experience can be translated and rendered comprehensible. And Frost, surveying the defeated or eccentric survivals of a passing breed, replaces imagination by "sensibility," tragedy by a certain pathos rather finely tempered by common sense.¹

Tate's despair at the unfortunate state of modern society was not shared by Ransom, who, with a kind of Shelleyan faith in the poet's role, found a "solution" in a dichotomy: the writer was clearly a part of culture, yet separate from society. Hence, he could, and should, create--whatever the character of his environment. It was this faith that later encouraged the Fugitive-Agrarians to act as polemicists:

later twenties suggests that the resolution was achieved not by denial of other areas of man's interest, not in psychology, but in the agrarian movement--which not only involved art, but welcomed the moral, sociological, philosophical, historical, and economic. Tate called their "solution" religious humanism.

¹ "Hawthorne, Anderson, and Frost," The New Republic, LIV (May 16, 1928), 400.

Do you not attach too much importance to the principle of community between the poet and his public? Very fine thing if possible. But poets can't wait on that. To some extent they are not merely the expression, they are also the prophets and teachers of their compatriots. Poetry comes out spontaneously, not after looking to see if the times are ripe. Too much fine poetry has had to wait on its public to come after it, and the values in it have been posthumous. Poetry is individual first, it is social second. It is not so important that Dante's public believed in the trinity; more important that Dante did.

[Letter to Allen Tate,
February 20, 1927]

The explanation for Ransom's departure from Tate's position may be found in two assumptions: that poetry was a special case and must be treated differently from other manifestations of art and that because modern civilization is uncongenial to poetry, the poet believes he cannot function. For Ransom, as it was later for the Agrarians, the artist's hope lay not in a superstructure of theory spun out of reason (the scientist's approach) but in the imperishable character of the aesthetic which was the essence of his human-ness. The artist who attempts to create from an aesthetic theory which is constructed out of ideas uninvolved with sensible reality, Ransom believed, will come to grief:

I believe in universals, . . . But I object to universals which are constructed and not found. In other words, I object to those universals which are supersensible, which are mathematically infinite and grasped by reason rather than sense. Why should art bother with them? To use them at all art has to imagine them, which is to put with them the contingency and quality that are not there. . . . They are elegant as fictions . . . but should be held strictly as fictions all the same, as entities which cannot be perceived and have no aesthetic quality. The reason we have to reject them aesthetically is that, when we try to use them aesthetically, we tell lies and fall into disrepute and lose even our own self respect. . . .

[Letter to Allen Tate,
1927 (Fall?)]

Ransom's critique of Tate's aesthetic theory at this time pointed up his conviction that poetry should not be separated from the other arts and that it has a chance to survive the antithetical elements of civilization, if only the artist's

beliefs are bold; resignation and despair are no solution to the dilemma:

You have been treating poetry in perfect isolation from the other arts. You have arrived at a view of poetry which makes it depend for its life on the reconstitution of cosmologies and supersensibles. Now I think the way of treating poetry separately from the other arts exposes us to almost any sort of error; hardly any error is too extravagant to look likely under this method. But isn't that a poor view of art which cannot be applied, mutatis mutandis, to the other arts? . . . You don't write of a crisis in the arts generally, more than the possible difficulty of finding arts and patrons of the arts in a scientific age; and what right have you to conclude that poetry is a particularly perishable art, which is now about to die because of what has been going on in science and philosophy? To me this consideration seems to show that your view is not robustious and hardy enough; nor radical enough.

[Letter to Allen Tate,
1927 (Fall?)]

The conviction that the arts are interrelated and that they tend to reveal something about the culture of their age was also expressed by Stark Young some years before the publication of the symposium:

What sculpture must mean in the end is a comment on life, some idea, some quality, some glory or some decision of living set down there. What one man thinks about life may be read in the rigidity of a line, and another by the shadow of an eye. If your professor said to you that the character of the ideas that went into government, into politics and literature and manners, went also into the marbles of Pericles' time, the same thing in a different language, he would have started you in the right final direction.¹

Such assertions indicate the "radical" direction in which the future Agrarians were moving with their aesthetic theory--an expansion to permit their battle for art to embrace the Southern cause. That there was a connection between the discussions of their theories of aesthetics and the "practical" activity they were beginning to consider is implied in the letter by Ransom wherein he objected to "universals" and at

¹"Henry's Art Course," Encaustics, p. 46.

the same time expressed a hope of doing something for the South. In the context of the letter art and the Southern way of life are connected in his mind:

The Fugitives met last night. The more I think about it, the more I am convinced of the excellence and the enduring vitality of our common cause. Here, at Vanderbilt, which draws a lot of Old South talent, we have a very workable mine of young poets and fresh minds; always some one or two or more just clamoring for the right food and drink and society. We've got to keep working that field; we have some perpetuums for the carry-over, like Don and me; and our cause is, we all have sensed this at about the same moment, the Old South. . . . I like my own people, or rather I respect them intensely.

[Early March, 1927,
undated letter.]

The "New South" enemies in their commentaries on art were identifiable under the all-inclusive label "science." They might appear in various roles--for example, critics who constructed a single "system" by which to judge all works were being "scientific," not literary; that is, they were evaluating a work on the basis of a formula, on a priori assumptions. A critic who was true to the nature of his material would judge a work on its particularities, on its individual, concrete character. This was a view held consistently through the four years prior to the publication of the symposium. It served in 1926 as a basis for Allen Tate's critique of a work of literary criticism by Edwin Muir. While voicing approval of Muir's "amateur metaphysics" as a basis of literary criticism and while expressing a sympathy for the lament that we resemble Eliot's Tiresias who stood "throbbing between two lives"--"our mythology is dead and we have not yet achieved a substitute for it out of the world-picture of modern science," Tate nevertheless concluded: "Valuable as nearly all of Mr. Muir's judgments are, it must be pointed out that they are philosophical, not literary criticism; they interpret a given work to Mr. Muir himself; they do not isolate and expose its properties."¹

¹"Tiresias," The Nation, CXXIII (November 17, 1926), 509.

John Crowe Ransom takes Edmund Wilson to task for a similar fault--the formulation of a single critical, untenable principle on which to judge poetry; it is a principle Ransom found unacceptable because of its narrow vision as well as its mistaken assumption about the nature of the poet's relation to his society. Rejecting Wilson's "single consideration" phrased in several ways--"poetry must 'have its roots in contemporary reality,' . . . its theme must indicate that the poet 'has a stake in society,'" Ransom offered a "counter set of related propositions":

Poetry is automatically and inevitably contemporary and in reflecting the most actual and important experiences of the poet reflects indubitable contemporary data. . . . The prime virtue of poetry as a contemporary document is not its directness in which it is greatly exceeded by prose, but its sincerity in which it is reputed to have no equals. . . . The general doctrine might be called a Critical positivism: it is deeply informed with the conviction that critics must renounce their a priori formulas and their ex cathedra manners. They must prepare themselves to admit that their formulas will never fully explain the poem, and will probably not even explain their judgment of the poem. . . .¹

The poet, too, might be influenced by something analogous to the tenor of the times. Even the poetry of Eliot, which Tate admired greatly,² to some extent reflected the

¹"The Poet and the Critic," New Republic, LI (June 22, 1927), 125-126.

²Tate's early devotion to Eliot is a matter of record. It was he who introduced Eliot to his fellow Fugitives, he who began, as he said, "an impertinent campaign in Eliot's behalf in the South." John Bradbury notes that Eliot became for Tate a kind of directional model in his writing as a poet and free lance reviewer in New York, that certain of Tate's critical principles were Eliot's, that he applied "the theme of the loss of a 'racial myth,' together with that of the poet's need to be 'aware of his own age.'" [The Fugitives, p. 25.]

As a poet, Tate has publicly avowed Eliot to be one of his masters. Much of Tate's earlier poetry, including the well known and admired "Death of Little Boys," "Horatian Ode," "The Subway," "Retroduction of American History, and "Mr. Pope," reveal the profound impact Eliot had on both Tate's attitude and mode of expression. [See Vivienne Koch, "The Poetry of Allen Tate," Kenyon Review, XI (Summer, 1949), 356 ff. and John Bradbury, The Fugitives, chap. iv, for detailed, critical discussions.)

influence of an unpoetical, critical spirit, said Tate. In a review of Eliot's first important collection of poetry, Poems, 1909-1925, Tate suggested that Eliot's criticism of the modern age has unfortunately resulted in a poetry perhaps too intellectual, or imperfect in its realization of theme:

The critical idea of disorder began, in the poetry, as the desperate atmosphere of isolation. It was obviously conviction prior to reflection, but to one in Mr. Eliot's spiritual unrest it speedily becomes a protective idea; it ceases to be emotion, personal attitude; . . . This rationalization of attitude puts in a new light the progressive sterilization of his poetry. . . . a poetry with the tendency to ideas betrays itself into criticism, as it did in Arnold, when it becomes too explicit, too full. His collected poems is the preparation for a critical philosophy of the present state of European literature. As this criticism becomes articulate, the poetry becomes incoherent. The intellectual conception is now so complete that he suddenly finds there is no symbolism, no expressive correspondence, no poetry for it. . . . Mr. Eliot apprehends his reality with the intellect, and reality does not yield a coherent theme.¹

From these commentaries one implication emerges--that insofar as the poet and the critic ignore the concrete experience or specifics of reality, insofar as they depend upon a formula for the creation or judgment of a work of art, they have been victimized by the world of science. If art is to be effective in such a world, the creation must be judged on its own terms; it must be valued for its particularities, not for its system of ideas--so Tate seemed to suggest in his comments on Lascelles Abercrombie as a "philosophical critic." This position Tate questioned because it is based on an "investigation of poetry . . . conducted ultimately in the interest of a subjective philosophical order independent of poetry," an insistence that "the central reality of poetry is the wholeness of the poem," an assumption that an abstraction can be experienced. For Tate, "the preeminence of poetry as experience is unique, but to expect of it a metaphysical

¹"A Poetry of Ideas," The New Republic, XLVII (June 30, 1926), 172.

satisfaction is an effort to render it common." Abercrombie, concluded Tate, is a critic with an attitude, but he lacks sensibility. His concern is not with the "important problems of literature," with the immediate but "with the subordination of literature to an idea."¹

For Ransom, too, a dualism of sensibility and reason is implicit. His paired alternatives were the symbolic cluster enabling him to inveigh against formula thinking while supporting the cause of aesthetics; thus in certain areas of humane experience he found the contradiction of scientific abstraction:

My view is that we must, as Critics, not only define the fictions of science for what they are but also the fictions of philosophy. Philosophy of the usual or "constructive" sort, and not of the Kantian or critical sort, is an attempt to formulate in a more sophisticated way, but still to formulate the reality which science has quite obviously failed to grasp. So are religious systems. Their formulas must be questioned. . . . The State, the Soul, God, the World, the Cosmos--and all the universals spelled with a capital--these are types of the scientific fiction put together by reason and quite exceeding the senses: Supersensibles. They have in this condition no aesthetic quality, no reality. But religion, art (of the old order), and philosophy have more or less sily, more or less flagrantly, tried to animate them, to give them quality and life. . . . What we required always is to return simply to the senses; and this means, not that there is any superior certainly attaching to sensibles . . . but that every Sensible is a source of inexhaustible sensation and carries its own infinity with it at every moment in a way that Supersensibles can not possibly do. Reality means simply inexhaustible quality. . . . The artist is the man who keeps his eyes open and is not afraid to look. . . . It is quite a quaint idea that we are to find this world out there somewhere transcending sense. And there are no formulas. The formulas are the specific delusion.

[Letter to Allen Tate,
February 20, 1927]

These observations and pronouncements of aesthetic doctrine were not so remote from later agrarian activity as might be supposed. The basic dualism of the position--the separation of sensibility from reason, of the experience of

¹"A Philosophical Critic," New Republic, XLVI (April 21, 1926), 281.

concrete reality from the construction of abstract theory-- provides, by analogy, the philosophical foundation for the critique of an industrial society and a defense of an agrarian way of life. Man is best able to experience the aesthetic by living close to nature; the enjoyment of life becomes difficult, if not impossible, when he adopts the values of an abstracting, scientific society. It was John Crowe Ransom who most explicitly related the distinctive characteristic of an aesthetic experience to agrarianism, a way of life which implied a love of nature. The function of his dualism in the defense is made clear with his definition of "romantic":

I would denote by the term romantic, as a quality in art, just that rare and simple attitude which we call the love of nature. And that means the love of anything for itself. Science is pragmatic and bent only in using nature. Scientific knowledge is no more than the uses of nature; . . . As a way of knowledge it is possible to use only as we anesthetize ourselves and become comparatively insensible.¹

The quality common to the "romantic" as an attitude toward art and the agrarian as a way of life is suggested through the importance Ransom attaches to the "infinities of particularity"-- "the landscapes, the people, the flora, the merest things." "This," he asserted, is "the purest esthetic experience." For him, romantic art is clearly aesthetic in its character because it goes "deeper and suspends the whole purpose-and-attainment process. . . . It exercises that impulse of natural piety which requires of us that our life should be in loving rapproch with environment."²

To charge these Southerners with a narrow perspective for their concern with the aesthetic is to underestimate the inclusiveness of their theory; art for them was not to be isolated from life. They became convinced that if any values of culture were to flourish, or even to survive, they would do so only in the right kind of environment. Hence, America's

¹"Classical and Romantic," 127.

²Ibid.

commercial civilization--with its concern for getting and spending, its desire for power, its demand that an act or a belief be useful or practical, its faith in the gospel of materialism--would have to be replaced by a pleasure in living for its own sake. Ransom described the meaning of the aesthetic for contemporary society in such oppositions:

The sense of power that comes from the operation of machinery is to be distinguished from esthetic pleasure. This latter does not come to us till we have abandoned the desire process. The mark of the esthetic experience is its desirelessness. . . . and it is possible only when we neither desire the world nor pretend to control it. Our pleasure in this attitude probably lies in a feeling of communion . . . with environment which is fundamental in our human requirements--but which is sternly discouraged in the mind that has the scientific habit.¹

Unfortunately, the Agrarians came to lament, it is the scientific spirit, not the aesthetic, which prevails and which distinguishes a commercial society from a cultured civilization. An aesthetic attitude will grow among men who live graciously, whose efforts are not directed exclusively toward demonstrating the usefulness and monetary value of their activity. It cannot, however, be bought or acquired rapidly--travel, the wide-spread reading of books (purchased through clubs), education--all the techniques to which an industrial society resorts in an attempt to spread "culture" are ineffectual--for these are mere techniques or tools, attempting to force the growth of culture:

[The industrialists] are proposing now quite a new program. This program is the acquisition of "culture"--of learning, of manners, of esthetic understanding, of the amenities of life.

This proposal falls on grateful ears, as a matter of course, with those whose profession is to disseminate culture; such as Chautauquas, lecturers, travel bureaus, publishers, and authors and artists. Industrialism is so kind! These gladly accept the patronage offered them, but even with the best of motives, they play into the hands of the industrial system and do not accomplish the good they intend. . . . ²

¹ God Without Thunder, p. 173.

² Ibid., p. 198.

The apparent advantages from the manifestations of "culture" are misunderstood, continued Ransom, "if they do not inspire . . . courage to live simply and with sensibility." Travel may mean little: "There may easily be more true culture in circumscribing one field with a plow than in the Grand Tour itself as it is sometimes conducted in these days." Not even universal formal education is a satisfactory means of becoming cultured, unless it teaches young men and women how to live, which means teaching them "not to go out and plunge into industrialism with their fathers and uncles." Thus, aesthetics have been expanded into a philosophical position, and have become a means of opposing the inherent character of an industrial society which cannot, Ransom implied, create culture unless it changes the character of its subjects' lives. By definition such a change is an impossibility, for industrialism promotes the acquisition of material commodities while "culture is something which will have to be trusted like the grace of God to come of its own accord, but will never come unless the right sort of living invites it."¹

These poets have been charged with deserting the cause of poetry for a quasi-political-economic activity, and although their writings through the late 1920's may to some degree support such a view, a careful reading of what they say and the assumptions, implied or stated, on which they based their defense of a "Southern" way of life would indicate that they were still enlisted in the battle for art in general, and for poetry in particular. At the Fugitive Reunion, Donald Davidson disagreed with Merrill Moore that the "kind of mind" the poets had who turned Agrarian differed from that of their Fugitive days. Davidson added to Lytle's assertion that it was "a continuous kind of operation of the same kind of mind growing into a different kind of air"²:

The symposium I'll Take My Stand can be taken just as much as a defense of poetry as it can be taken as a

¹Ibid., pp. 198-199. ²Fugitives' Reunion, p. 179.

defense of the South¹ . . . or of any particular politics, or economics, or anything. The general point is . . . that in the order of life that we would defend or seek to establish, these things are not to be separated if life is to be healthy at all; that the separation of them into specialities under the modern regime is the thing, above everything else that destroys poetry. Therefore, I'll Take My Stand is as much a defense of Merrill Moore as a poet, and of Bill Elliott as a poet, and as a student of government--a free student of government, not bound under a totalitarian regime--it's as much that as it is an exposi-² tion of the case of the South under the Agrarian conception.

Tate completely subscribed to Davidson's analysis, adding: "We all assume that a kind of religious humanism is the moral and spiritual condition which is favorable to poetry. And the cutting edge of the book [I'll Take My Stand] seemed to be historical and political, but the thing that gave the book value to me, and still gives it value . . . is what I would call the reaffirmation of religious humanism, and this is very intimately connected with poetry."³

Views on History

The relationship between Fugitive-Agrarian ideas on art and a consciously developed interest in the Southern past is not so tenuous as a casual consideration would suggest. As poets and biographers, they began to involve themselves with the traditions, symbols, and figures of their region's history; and their representation of the past usually appeared in terms of the present. In such a poem as Ransom's "Old Mansion," the native "intruder" recognizes the decay that had subtly invaded the stability of the Southern manor; nevertheless it had cast upon him an insidious miasma of nostalgic loss. The past, in contrast to the present, offered a security that the antiquary (though not the mere recorder of time's events) would preserve:

¹ Tate agreed at this point.

² Fugitives' Reunion, p. 181.

³ Ibid., p. 183. For a discussion of their views of the value and importance of religion, see pp. 127-145.

Emphatically, the old house crumbled. The ruins
 Would litter, as already the leaves, this petted sward;
 And no annalist went in to the lords or the peons;
 The antiquary would gather the bits of shard.

But on retreating I saw myself in the token,
 How loving from my Russian weed the feather curled
 On the languid air; and I went with courage shaken
 To dip, alas, into some unseemlier world.¹

Certain similar ideas about history--both theoretical and applied--begin through the later twenties to emerge from their prolific writings, views which resulted from both historical research and personal convictions. Certainly the importance of "facts" was recognized, yet history was not a mere amassing of evidence. An interpretation of the "facts," they believed, was more than valid; it was necessary. And this "interpretation" for some of the poets in particular, using historical material in their poems or presenting history in biography, took form in the creation of symbols or a myth. They were convinced that the South possessed an historical sense, aware as it was of the presence of the past, of its reality in the present--in short, of the force of tradition. To rehabilitate Southern history, to end the feeling of colonial dependency on the North which had been dictating the interpretation of their past appeared to be one of their aims. Tate, for example, in a review for the New Republic implied that the teaching of American history in the South was not only distorted but also unfortunate for the South, since it had proved to be a means of spiritual loss:

"The South must win," said Jeff Davis, "or suffer the humiliation of having her history written by the New England historians." It was a moment of true prophecy,

¹Chills and Fever (New York, 1924), pp. 91-92. These last two stanzas were revised for Selected Poems, and appeared in the same form for the Vintage publication, Poems and Essays. The most striking changes were two words; for "gather" Ransom later wrote "finger"; "Russian weed" became "foreign weed"--the first subtle variation suggests the futility of an attempt, however devoted, to seek to hold on to the past; the second makes the inappropriateness of the "intruder's" world more inclusive and embodies the concept of an "unseemlier" world.

but the insight was not complete. Not only did the North write Southern history; it rooted it out and passed off in the South the local tales and legends of New England, which became an American background for the whole country. Southern school children sing "Land of the Pilgrims' Pride"; the whispering campaign, backed by a formidable invasion of textbooks, has achieved a moral conquest beside which Sherman's march and the pursuit to Appomattox pale. School-boys in Tennessee know about Apostle Eliot, but only a few old men have heard of the exploits of Captain John Donelson in the wilds of the Cumberland country. Well meaning orators, bravely calling for broadmindedness and liberalism in a section where an intolerant intransigence is at least the courageous part, tell the citizens, on Confederate Memorial Day, that they need not be ashamed of a grandfather who fought with Lee, that the grandfather could not have known how God had to use four years of war to show them the righteousness of Big Business and the iniquity of the farm. The spiritual conquest of the South has been impressive. . . .¹

The seriousness with which Owsley, Tate, Warren, and Lytle treated their region's leaders, the carefulness of their research, the very choice of subjects all suggest a determination to fight the "official" Reconstructionist view of the War between the States. A few months before the publication of the symposium, Tate noted with great approval that a more sympathetic interpretation of Southern history by Howard K. Beale had appeared; not only did it show greater understanding but it was more soundly based, for it recognized the cause and nature of the post-war defeat of the South: the establishment of industrialization as the dominant economic factor with the triumph of the Radical Party:

It is doubtful if this book could have been written even ten years ago: but within that time the excessive industrialization of the North, particularly of the Middle West, which still has a strong background of agrarianism, has brought about a perceptible revolution of opinion among Northern historians. The evils of our excessive industrialization--the plight of the farmer, the imminent danger that labor will be owned by capital, the impending international crises resulting from the need of foreign markets

¹"More about the Reconstruction," New Republic, LXIII (August 13, 1930), 376--a review of Howard K. Beale's The Critical Year: A Study of Andrew Johnson and the Reconstruction.

for our fantastic overproduction of manufactures, to say nothing of the decline of moral and social standards attending this economic situation--all these evils appear, to the long view, to go back to the critical year of 1866.¹

In God Without Thunder Ransom's discussion of history began by placing a "fact" in perspective:

The primary role of the historian is to establish the "facts." It has evidently not changed in the least from the role which was assumed by Herodotus, the Father of History. . . . A fact for him was evidently the impression of an event which he could establish as having been registered upon the senses of an honest and sound observer. . . . Fact is still the sensible event. . . . The historical method consists in asking questions or taking testimony from those who have participated in the sensible event. . . .²

But modern historians, he continued, go beyond the mere recording of sensible events:

They deal in "principles," "laws," and "causes," much as the physical scientists do. . . . Their field is human conduct in its social, ethnological, military, economic, political manifestations--it is humanistic rather than physical. Their general remarks are correspondingly the more precarious. But with this business of generalization history enters upon a second or scientific phase, and ceases to be the pure function which I have just described. In the primary sense history is still concerned with the sensible fact; but in a secondary sense it is scientific, or interpretative.³

When Frank Owsley had completed his research for King Cotton Diplomacy (during the period of an emerging agrarian philosophy) he concluded in his preface:

In assembling the data for this book the writer was amazed and pleased to find fundamental order underlying chaos and to discover purpose in confusion. That which gives order and purpose to Confederate diplomacy is the role which cotton played. Hence, the title, King Cotton Diplomacy.⁴

But data in themselves are not to be ignored. If a writer

¹Ibid., p. 377.

²God Without Thunder, pp. 56-57. ³Ibid., p. 57.

⁴King Cotton Diplomacy (Chicago, 1931), p. vii.

produces a work without adequate research--no matter how readable the style or how coherent the thesis--he does not deserve to be called a historian, so Owsley's harsh criticism of a biography of a Revolutionary War Tory would suggest. Calling Simon Girty: the White Savage by Thomas Boyd a "pot-boiler," he concluded: "Perhaps in his next biography Mr. Boyd will take a little more time for research and thereby be able to give us a book with substance and life in it. He is capable of this, hence the caustic disapproval of his shoddy life of Simon Girty."¹

The modern tendency to assume that the value of history lies in its mere description was not satisfying, for this was "science" in another guise. Several months before the publication of the symposium, Tate presented a critique of one view of the "historical method"--a critique which sought to demonstrate the logical fallacy of the method by showing that the proof for its validity rests upon equating existence with value. Because Tate regarded "historical method" (i.e., the description of what is) as "scientific method," he denied to such historians the right to make value judgments. Logically, he argued, they cannot use their method as proof that an affirmation of belief is unsound because their method is applied only to the world of existence, not to the world of faith. An approach to history which is all methodology fails to allow for different kinds of history and yields up so much fact that "history tends to collapse under its own weight." Tate admitted ironically that "factual" history is indispensable to survival in the world of action: "Without it, the business man would not be able to get to the subway and arrive at his office." But Tate's anti-industrial bias, which he linked with his critique of the "scientific" historical method, is implicit in his analysis:

Now, if an event is to take place, science can tell us, approximately, how it will take place; but that is all it

¹ "Girty 'Explained,'" Nashville Tennessean, October 21, 1928.

is entitled to say. The historical and scientific mind has no right to a positive conception of value, for in asserting it, it contradicts its method. Mr. Hoover's historically minded administration tells us how to be prosperous, without questioning the desirability of increasing prosperity, which is a value that it illegitimately sets up and affirms. Mr. Hoover is only one of many practitioners of the historical method who have committed intellectual suicide.¹

Faith in the "historical method" (i.e., science)² will, Tate suggested, logically and ultimately lead to despair and self-annihilation, for it assumes it is truth. Logically, Tate reasoned, the "proof" of the value of the historical method is circular, and therefore invalid:

Now the dogma that no value is tenable that will not survive the identification of its origins with its present pretensions is the dogma that the reformed drunkard is not reformed: he was a drunkard. It is the dogma that all values are a kind of delirium tremens. The historical method is thus the standard of value. It is truth. It is the truth of existence; it is existence; and existence is causal relation.

If existence is causal relation, if it is the historical method, it is a little difficult to see how existence can survive itself. For the belief in existence, like other beliefs, must run the gauntlet too. If the historical method knows no exception, it is possible to learn how we acquire the belief in existence. . . ; and since the belief in existence is the historical method, we apply that method to itself. The fine belief in the inescapable necessities turns out to be identical with its origins; it collapses. The historical method collapses. Rome Athens Alexandria Vienna London, Unreal. There is one thing to do next--to jump into the nearest river--if, in the waste land, the rivers are not all run dry--crying that one believes in nothing but existence.³

For John Gould Fletcher, history assumed meaning when viewed in the context of art and religion. Objecting to the "modern shallow view" that history is a collection of facts which, if properly arranged, will do our thinking for us, Fletcher pleaded for a symbolic reading; thus "humanity's

¹"Confusion and Poetry," Sewanee Review, XXXVIII (April-June, 1930), 137-138, 140.

²For comment on this aspect of their thought, see pp.426 ff.

³"Confusion and Poetry," 138-139.

highest and noblest . . . and most completely absolute values" would become the basis for a sounder understanding that would reveal history not as a record of progress but as "a series of fluctuations, periods of depression and stagnation alternating with periods of great hope and activity." From this perspective, Fletcher concluded that the last sixty years "have carried us far towards thorough-going religious and artistic chaos." Fletcher's approach is more that of a poet than of an historian:

What we have to do is to read history with a fresh understanding of its symbolic import. To do this we need only concentrate attention on the values . . . of art and religion. We are best able in them to study the great cultures of the world in their symbolic relation to each other. . . . Our object in studying history will become largely the task of sifting out the values of the past from the rubbish with which the present day has overlaid them.¹

This symbolic view of history, which was held by other Agrarians, led Fletcher to conclude that "history emerges as a series of symbols, each infused with profound spiritual meaning." Through myth alone, Fletcher believed, "man finds guidance . . . Some day someone will write the great myth² of our modern world: the story of man trying to tame the machine he has invented."³

The Southerner's awareness of the "presentness" of the

¹The Two Frontiers, completed in 1928, not published until 1930, pp. 4, 6-7.

²The idea of a "myth" as appropriate for the treatment of historical materials in creative form was to be the inspiring impetus for Robert Penn Warren's Brother to Dragons many years after Fletcher's suggested approach. (This is not to imply that Warren derived his view from Fletcher.) In the foreword to his "tale in verse and voices," Warren wrote: "I have tried to make my poem make, in a thematic way, historical sense along with whatever kind of sense it may be happy enough to make. Historical sense and poetic sense should not, in the end, be contradictory, for if poetry is the little myth we make, history is the big myth we live, and in our living, constantly remake." [p. xii.]

³The Two Frontiers, pp. 23-24.

past in his heritage has been noted as one of his distinguishing characteristics. Based on the fact that the South has undergone a military defeat, an occupation, and a reconstruction which no other section of the country experienced, it makes impossible for Southerners the illusion cherished by many Americans that "history is something unpleasant that happens to other people."¹ This implicit assumption of an acute historical sense occasionally was made explicit² in order to contrast features of the Southern character with the Northern. Allen Tate's interpretive account in Stonewall Jackson (1928) of pre-Civil War history charged the North with an "atrophied" historical sense which made possible its unjustified assumption of a superior morality while denying its responsibility for slavery:

Men, whose great-grandfathers had sold the Indians to the West Indian traders and had got negroes in return, whom they sold to Virginians, did not feel themselves to be involved in the transaction. The Northern men did not feel

¹C. Vann Woodward, "The Irony of Southern History," Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South, ed. by Louis Rubin, Jr., and Robert Jacobs (Baltimore, 1955), p. 64.

²Robert Penn Warren, for example, reaffirmed a belief in the distinctiveness of a Southern historical sense: "History didn't stop that day [the period of Reconstruction and the Hayes-Tilden Compromise] south of the Mason-Dixon line. Of course the big split in American life is that history did stop for certain other people at a certain date. It stopped for the happy children of the Gilded Age. They settled down to making money and getting those railroads built out West and digging the gold out and speculating in land and watering stock and developing a continent, and on the way sometimes looting it and a fair percentage of their fellow-citizens. The heroic effort and the brigandage are both in the brew. But for a variety of reasons, history didn't stop for certain other people. Down South they were stuck with it, sometimes for some very poor reasons, including stupidity. But one good and sufficient reason was that the South was stuck with a lot of unresolved issues, including the question of the relation of the economy of the South to that of the rest of the country--and including the race question. To sum up, you might say that the South got bogged down in history--in time--and the North got bogged down in non-history--non-time--and that split is the tragic fact of American life." [Transcript of Paris Review interview, "The Art of Fiction XVIII" (1957), pp. 22-23. (Typewritten.)]

responsible for this procedure; lacking the historical sense, they could repudiate it in the name of morality. They had come to believe in abstract right. Where abstract right supplants obligation, interest begins to supplant loyalty.¹

The result, continued the biographer, could be revolution, a revolution in which society's checks on man's individual impulses to selfishness are lost. Thus, Tate arrived at a historical justification for criticism of the ante-bellum North:

When such a revolution triumphs, society becomes a chaos of self-interest. Its freedom is the freedom to do wrong. This does not mean that all men will do the wrong thing; only that no external order exists which precludes the public exercise of wrong impulses; too much, in short, is left to the individual. It was such a revolution that the Northern States were now moving towards.²

The most obvious and rewarding source demonstrating the distinctiveness of the South in history was, of course, the Civil War and the leaders it produced--Northern and Southern, political and military. But not solely in the choice of subject did these future Agrarians reveal the "southernness" of their historical character; in their use and interpretation of their region's history they were also unconsciously constructing a fortress within which, as a group, they could consciously defend their traditional way of life.

Davidson, for instance, voiced his approval of Count Keyserling's method and perspective in Europe, and singled out for commendation the author's emphasis on the uniqueness of peoples. The review became a defense for a regional approach in history, a polemic for the South, structured on the assumption that history may be viewed as individual and regional biography. From Keyserling's historical focus on uniqueness in nations, to be discovered, said Davidson, in a study of individualism, he turned to Stark Young as "first among those writers who should in the course of time restore to the South the knowledge of itself, that it was in danger of losing

¹ Stonewall Jackson, pp. 39-40.

² Ibid., p. 40.

altogether. . . . His Southern people all have the 'uniqueness' that we realize to belong to the Southern character, yet they have the 'all-human' quality which Keyserling talks about."¹

In a comment on the biographies written by the future contributors of I'll Take My Stand, Davidson, in retrospect, pointed out their assertion of Southern values through their interpretation of the section's past:

Allen Tate, in his life of Jefferson Davis, Andrew Nelson Lytle in his Bedford Forrest, and Robert Penn Warren in his John Brown, returned with vigor to the South of Civil War days and gave old issues a fresh motivation. Such differences in the interpretation of the past were typical; but the devoted absorption of all the biographers indicated a tendency, appearing in the very midst of insatiate modernism, to pause and look back.

Suddenly, in the very clash and thunder of partisan views, the historic South was being rehabilitated. Ironically enough, the biographers, the seekers after fact, were setting up the identical southern tradition that some of the fiction writers had been engaged in knocking down.²

A presentation of Southern history in terms of individuals enabled these biographers not only to render the past as a living reality but also to symbolize through recreated personalities the opposition between two ways of life. Here was their history emerging as "a series of symbols . . . infused with profound spiritual meaning"; here was their "myth," their account of a South trying to resist the power generated by the machine.³ Andrew Jackson, said Tate,

. . . hated wealth, if it brought leisure, and he hated institutions, by means of which a society devotes its leisure to culture. As a matter of fact, Andrew Jackson had an instinctive hatred of gentlemen; at least his dying words evinced a good deal of hate for Calhoun. It

¹"Keyserling's Conviction," "Critic's Almanac," Nashville Tennessean, July 9, 1928.

²"Trend of Literature," Culture in the South, ed. by W. T. Couch, p. 194.

³See p. 88 above.

is just possible to see Calhoun and Andrew Jackson as the Christ and AntiChrist of political order in the United States.¹

The Civil War leaders engaged their attention, not solely as striking personalities (although this motivation might be considered central) but as rallying points for reconstructing an explanation of how the Southern Cause might have been won:

Jackson [Stonewall] alone, as a soldier, was Lee and Longstreet combined; Longstreet alone was--Longstreet. Lee alone, as a soldier and as a man, was almost God. And that is why . . . Lee, one of the great men of all time, should have left the whole army to Jackson. For Lee, the soldier, was always something more than that. Godlike omniscience, being what it is, puts limits upon its own powers. . . .

He was probably the greatest soldier of all time, but his greatness as a man kept him from being a completely successful soldier. He could not bring himself to seize every means to the proposed end. Jackson, who saw one object only, could use them all. . . .

[Lee] was one of those great men in whose failure lies their greatness. He had a kind of sublime humility, a consciousness of the universal moral insufficiency, that kept him from asserting himself. His duty to the South included not only the defeat of the Federal army, but its defeat within the terms of the whole situation; and that situation contained the constituted authority of Mr. Davis.²

Jefferson Davis was, in Tate's portrait, deeply religious, somewhat vain, unrealistic. Finding Davis's innocence ("virtue in a saint, but . . . stupidity in a politician"³) the source of a major blunder, an unshakable belief in Bragg, Tate is led to conclude that the South's defeat was the result not of a basic moral flaw (Northern historians' customary charge) but of an unfortunate convergence of circumstances. As a man of letters and a Southerner bent on restoring his region's self-respect, Tate represented history in terms of individuals: "In spite of the mistakes of leaders, of the dissension among the people, of the lack of grand

¹Stonewall Jackson, p. 38.

²Ibid., pp. 254, 272-273, 285.

³Jefferson Davis: His Rise and Fall, p. 255.

strategy in the field, the Confederacy came within a hair of success; its entire history is a mosaic of tremendous ifs. If any one set of unfavorable circumstances had been warded off, the South would doubtless have won."¹

Lytle's Bedford Forrest also offers such an explanation for the outcome of the War between the States: One man in the Southern Confederacy might have saved the South, one man for whom the people, especially the plain people, and the army would have rallied--Nathan Bedford Forrest. But Jefferson Davis lacked the vision and courage to appoint him to command at a crucial moment in the war. The South's failure was its leader's failure:

It had been the judgment of most historians that the overwhelming resources of the North in men and supplies doomed the South to failure from the beginning. But this is justification after the event, and it is not sustained by other examples in History.² . . . No people is conquered until its spirit is broken, and this spirit was breaking because Davis could no longer lead his people.

[p. 357]

Like Tate and Lytle, Robert Penn Warren chose a figure of the Civil War period, a Northerner in whom he found embodied exploitative tendencies. John Brown's obsessive "devotion" to the cause of abolition was not so pure and humanitarian as idolaters had uncritically pictured it:

The desire [to get to the head of the heap] was susceptible to meanness, to chicanery, to bitter, querulous intolerance, to dishonesty, to vindictive and ruthless brutality. . . . His own will and God's will were one. Hypocrisy is too easy a word to use here, and too simple. If John Brown had no scruple at deception it was because the end justified the means. The end had justified so much in his life--embezzlement, theft, lying, cruelty, murder. . . . John Brown's enormous egotism expressed

¹ Ibid., pp. 96-97.

² Here Lytle mentions Frederick the Great and Prussia, fighting for seven years against great odds and emerging victorious; the defense of Thermopylae by 300 Spartans and 700 Thespians against vast hosts of Xerxes' Persians; and Hannibal's success at Cannae.

itself in one set of terms after another, and after Harper's Ferry there would be a final transposition of this egotism into new terms. . . . Does a man's will need justification beyond the will of God?¹

John Brown, declared Warren, was a man who lived by an abstract idea, who often failed to take account of the human situation; he was "a cipher, a symbol, in this argument [on how to deal with slavery] which has so little concern one way or the other with what sort of fellow he really was."² Had John Brown succeeded at Harper's Ferry, Warren suggested, the North itself probably would not have permitted "without interference a protracted period of bloodshed, anarchy, and violence"; thus, "the North and South might have learned that blood is indeed thicker than water, and a solution might have been reached without the convulsion of the four terrific years from 1861 to 1865. Of course, there were issues other than slavery."³

The attachment of these Southerners to their history was more than an intellectual involvement, the result of research and writing; it was also a personal, in some cases a familial relationship, emotional in expression, sometimes nostalgic in the sense of loss it conveyed--and again it was rooted in the Civil War. As early as 1921 John Gould Fletcher considered writing a poem about the War between the States. Though for a time he was dissuaded by Edwin Arlington Robinson with the argument that because the issues were so confused on both sides, a poet would have great difficulty in creating a logical structure that would do justice to the subject, Fletcher returned to his idea with a new approach; he considered "transposing it out of the dimension of historic fact into the dimension of myth and fable." The Civil War, as he saw it, "had been a conflict between two opposing views, two diametrically opposite ways of living: the agrarian, feudal way of the South, and the industrial, mercantile way

¹ John Brown: The Making of a Martyr (New York, 1929), pp. 350-351.

² Ibid., p. 432.

³ Ibid., pp. 281-282.

of the North." For him the Civil War was a symbol of a dualism, illustrating the divided aim in all human affairs, a dualism which he thought might be transposed from the temporary to the universal.¹

Personal family recollections and his own proximity to the battlefields infuse Davidson's "The Sod of Battlefields" from The Tall Men with nostalgic sensitivity, and the Civil War comes alive once more:

. . . But here
Was the place of battle. You who have never known
The scour and pierce of battle may only remember
Moments by names, places by monuments,
But I who was born by the battle-fields cannot
Escape a sorrow that dwells, a valor that lingers,
A hope that spoke on lips now still. It is
A fey place, haunted and old with tales
That I have heard and will not soon forget.
.

. . . Have I forgotten
The dead young men whose flesh will not reflower
But in this single bloom which now I pluck,
Weaving it into my spirit as victors weave
A chaplet, gathered from mould, for honor's sake?
This is my body, woven from dead and living,
Given over again to the quick lustration
Of a new moment. This is my body and spirit,
Broken but never tamed, risen from the bloody sod.
Walking suddenly alive in a new morning.

[pp. 20, 27]

Of all the works embodying reactions to or experiences of the Civil War, Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" is probably the best known. First written in 1926 and revised over a period of ten years, this symbolic representation of a dissociated modern man's abortive attempt and ultimate failure to maintain an "active faith" which has decayed in the surrounding "fragmentary cosmos" is, according to Tate, "a certain section of history made into experience."² The poem contains two sets of references, or themes: Narcissism and the Confederate Dead--held together by concrete images in a dramatic

¹Life Is My Song, pp. 286-287.

²"Narcissus as Narcissus," p. 336.

tension which removes them from their separate worlds of psychology and history into the realm of art. That Tate intended the poem as a whole to represent an experience of Narcissism or "solipsism" is apparent from his own commentary on the "Ode." That it also was permeated with a sense of a heroic past, Southern in character, is unmistakable. The poem, wrote Tate in 1938, "is 'about' solipsism, a philosophical doctrine which says that we create the world in the act of perceiving it; or about Narcissism, or any other ism that denotes the failure of the human personality to function objectively in nature and society."¹ Tate's implicit critique is directed against modern society: man no longer finds the fields for expressing his unity of being; he "wastes his energy piecemeal over separate functions"; characteristic of our age, he becomes self-conscious, preoccupied with himself. It is this kind of man who stands by the Confederate graveyard on a late autumn afternoon, listening to the wind-driven, splayed leaves "sough the rumour of mortality." But he is turned to stone, "plunged to a heavier world below" where, like the "blind crab" heaving, he shifts his "sea-space"--a creature with "mobility but no direction; energy but, from the human point of view, no purposeful world to use it in," "the first intimation of the nature of the moral conflict . . .: the cut-offness of the modern 'intellectual man' from the world."²

To this man, the poet commands his attention to the past, in an embodiment of the "theme of heroism"--or as Hart Crane described it [Tate said Crane's commentary was "better than any I can make"], "the theme of chivalry, a tradition of excess [here Tate interpolated "not literary excess, rather active faith"] which cannot be perpetuated in the fragmentary cosmos of today."³ But the modern man cannot quite believe that the heroic theme, this "formal ebullience of the human spirit in an entire society," is available to him; he can go

¹ Ibid., p. 334.

² Ibid., p. 337.

³ Ibid.

no further than to imagine briefly that the flying leaves are charging soldiers--then he returns to the naturalistic view of death as "spiritual extinction [in] the decay of the body." The meditating man (who is not the author) cannot accept the illusory escape from his solipsism; for him "autumn and the leaves are death; the men who exemplified in a grand style an 'active faith' are dead; there are only the leaves."¹

You know who have waited by the wall
 The twilight certainty of an animal;
 Those midnight restitutions of the blood
 You know--the immitigable pines, the smoky frieze
 Of the sky, the sudden call; you know the rage
 The cold pool left by the mounting flood--
 The rage of Zeno and Parmenides.
 You who have waited for the angry resolution
 Of those desires that should be yours tomorrow,
 And know the unimportant shrift of death
 And praise the vision
 And praise the arrogant circumstance
 Of those who fall
 Rank upon rank, hurried beyond decision--
 Here by the sagging gate, stopped by the wall.

Seeing, seeing only the leaves
 Flying, plunge and expire

Turn your eyes to the immoderate past,
 Turn to the inscrutable infantry rising
 Demons out of the earth--they will not last.
 Stonewall, Stonewall--and the sunken fields of hemp
 Shiloh, Antietam, Malvern Hill, Bull Run.
 Lost in that orient of the thick and fast
 You will curse the setting sun.

Cursing only the leaves crying
 Like an old man in a storm

You hear the shout--the crazy hemlocks point
 With troubled fingers to the silence which
 Smothers you, a mummy, in time. The hound bitch
 Toothless and dying, in a musty cellar
 Hears the wind only.²

The setting sun Tate intended as a triple image, representing

¹ Ibid., p. 338.

² In Poems, 1928-1931 (New York, 1932). This version differs only slightly in choice of word and punctuation from the final form given in Poems, 1922-1947, but departs considerably from earlier versions.

the decline of the heroic age, the natural desolation of an actual scene of a late afternoon and the spiritual desolation experienced by the man at the gate.¹ Self-consciously he has turned his eyes into the past; for a moment he thinks he hears the noise of battles which he has evoked with his "historic sense"--but the "inscrutable infantry" does not last; the crying leaves, imagined into a shout, became a smothering silence in time; and the man, picturing himself as something lower than he ought to be, a mummy, a hound bitch (chosen "because the hound is a hunter, participant of a formal ritual"²) cannot see the heroic virtues of a past age, the virtues possessed by the Confederate dead. He sees only flying, plunging, expiring leaves. Tate brings the "Ode" (the title is deliberately ironic, for the "scene of the poem is not a public celebration, it is a lone man by a gate"³) to the question of moral import, the question to which he and his fellow Southerners imbued with the history of their region sought an answer: What should they do in a world that fragments man, that dissociates him from his past, that atrophies his aesthetic sensibility? Should they seek death, or should they "live" in spiritual disintegration?

What shall we say who have knowledge
Carried to the heart? Shall we take the act
To the grave? Shall we, more hopeful, set up the grave
In the house? The ravenous grave?⁴

¹"Narcissus as Narcissus," p. 342.

²Ibid., p. 342.

³Ibid., p. 340.

⁴Davidson had asked Tate early in 1928 if the lines "What shall we do who have knowledge carried to the heart?" were the origin of his biography Stonewall Jackson. In reply Tate wrote: "The Confederate poem, specifically the passage you quote, is its germ. That passage came out of God-knows-where (as most poems do); and after it was on paper it served to bring up a whole stream of associations and memories, suppressed at least on the emotional plane, since my childhood. This quest of the past is something we all share, but it is most acute in me . . .; for since the Civil War my family has scattered to the four winds, and no longer exists as a social unit. Such isolation is ordinarily a pitfall at the bottom of

The poet's "answer" re-affirms in concrete, condensed metaphors, the immutability of time, the inescapability of death, the continuity of death with life--and the futility of remaining with the past:

Leave now
 The shut gate and the decomposing wall:
 The gentle serpent, green in the mulberry bush,
 Riots with his tongue through the hush--
 Sentinel of the grave who counts us all.¹

It is clearly possible to discuss the "Ode" from many

which lies eccentricity . . . and sentimental extravagance of the most appalling kind. In this situation I can only thank God for scepticism, which like formaldehyde, is a great preservative of all sorts of things--of a sense of how things really were and of a resistance against things as they are. To lack one, I believe, is to lack the other." [Undated letter (March, 1928), as quoted by Cowan, The Fugitive Group, pp. 242-243.]

¹Tate writes of the last lines: "The closing image, that of the serpent, is the ancient symbol of time, and I tried to give it the credibility of the commonplace by placing it in a mulberry bush--with the faint hope that the silkworm would somehow be implicit. But time is also death. If that is so, then space, or the Becoming, is life; and I believe there is not a single spatial symbol in the poem." ["Narcissus as Narcissus," p. 339.]

Louis Rubin, Jr., approaches this passage from the more purely aesthetic point of view, the meaning of which he then relates to a basic Agrarian thesis--an affirmation of the validity of the aesthetic in a world of applied science and abstraction: "Tate's lines . . . do not simply give 'advice'; they do not base their appeal on their adaptability to counsel. They are not dependent upon any scientific 'proof' of their correctitude. Both alone and in the context of the Ode they create their own validity. They do not pretend to be representative of scientific knowledge and proof; they are their own knowledge and proof. They are about serpents and mulberry bushes and shut gates and decomposing walls, and not advice to graveyard visitors. Tate's poem isn't a mere pseudo-scientific statement, and it doesn't depend upon a paraphrase of a scientific statement, and its validity is neither confirmable nor refutable by scientists. It may or may not contain a statement of scientific truth, but that would at most be a portion, only one of a number of parts, involved in the whole creation of the poem. The poem, therefore, does not depend upon science; science plays only a relatively minor role. The relationship is obvious to the Agrarian belief in the equality of the aesthetic pursuits with the scientific." ["The Serpent in the Mulberry Bush," Southern Renaissance, p. 359.]

approaches--psychological, social, moral, regional, aesthetic. Yet Tate's awareness of history, represented in his evocation of the past through the image of the Confederate dead, permeates the poem. For the poet, one value of history is that it offers a source for myths which can be objectified into an aesthetic experience. This value was to appear more explicitly and to find many expressions through the following years of Agrarian activity.

Views on Education

Specific comments in defense of Southern education before the appearance of the symposium were not frequent, even though half of the group were teachers at the time. A classical education for the sons of the educated, for the gentlemen planters, acquired through private tutors or through attendance at academies of a semi-private nature¹ would, of course, have been a means of preserving a traditional, aristocratic, non-urban way of life. However, such an education obviously was not equally available to all Southerners.² Consequently, it might be inferred that for this reason, among others, a defense of Southern education was not at that time one of their ready weapons of attack against the forces of science. Several of the future Agrarians themselves apparently had recognized the necessity to go to the Northeast or abroad for study.³

¹Semi-private academies were founded by private interests and supported by student tuition, but they held state charters and drew their students from some distance. [Willard Thorp, "Longstreet on Waddell's Academy," A Southern Reader, p. 197.]

²In 1930, for instance, the percentage of rural illiteracy in Tennessee was 8.8--twice as high as that in urban areas. [Tennessee, A Guide to the State, p. 126.]

³The fact that Southerners go North or East or abroad to study is another tradition--the more gifted and more economically privileged sons customarily acquired an education in an Eastern university--Princeton, Yale or Harvard, or in England at Oxford or Cambridge. Wade, Nixon, Owsley, Lytle, Young and Warren studied for advanced degrees outside the South at Columbia, Chicago, Yale, and California; Fletcher had attended Harvard for most of his undergraduate study; Ransom and Warren were Rhodes scholars.

Nevertheless, in spite of the recognized and acknowledged inadequacies of Southern education, the stand was taken that Southerners (even in the ante-bellum period) were as well educated as Northerners in some respects, while in others, they had acquired unmatched values. For a Southern education could instill in native sons thoughts and feelings for the traditions of their land, which the very atmosphere of a Northern institution would make impossible. Stark Young writes of the contrast between his experiences at the University of Mississippi and at Columbia:

Nothing could be clearer than that the education I got at our old Southern university was not solid and thorough. It would not have been more solid and thorough if I had gone to one of the great universities of the Eastern states. It would have been different, of course . . . as I realized from my considerable associations in later years with these universities. I might have had an education that, without any significant regard to social tradition or any profound continuity in any way of life, was more accurate, informative, and obligatory, more tagged and overorganized. As an introduction to science it might have been, if you like, more scientific. But for us, in the gentle disparity of our hearts, it would have proved to be lacking in any intense acknowledgment of the value of thought in the abstract, . . . of knowledge divorced from the practical use of it, and of the descent of grace upon those who believe thus.

These were the qualities permitted to flower in a Southern humanistic education, these "small bits of ideas and knowledge . . . filled with some vague passion and ambition," not "the laboratory and clutter of theories, schools of psychology, tags of the scientific" which were to come in vogue later.²

This same emphasis on the humanities appears in Tate's affirmation of the value of an ante-bellum Southern education: "It is now a century-and-a-half of old New England prejudice that the Southerners were unlettered: they were wary of new and crank ideas, and they missed the intellectual fashions that the East yearly imported from Europe, but in sound

¹The Pavilion, pp. 156-157.

²Ibid., pp. 157, 158.

culture they were the equal of any Americans', and in their knowledge of the humanities superior to the New Englanders."¹

In pointing out that higher education in the North and South did not differ significantly before the Civil War-- "colleges tended to be conservative social instruments everywhere"--Ransom considered Southern education a means of embodying and preserving the values of a non-industrial society: Southerners "had a certain amount of learning, which was not as formidable as it might have been; but at least it was classical and humanistic learning, not highly scientific, and not widely scattered about over a variety of special studies."² Obliquely Ransom criticized by contrast the modern emphasis in education: on democratic choices rather than strict discipline, on the utilitarian and the scientific rather than the cultural:

It seems important to reflect that the South as a going society would not have countenanced the innovation of an elective college curriculum. The first aim of such a society is to protect its social concept, and this means the ascendancy in education of that group of studies which has social significance; they used to be called the humanities before they were forbidden to use so proud a term. . . .

In a true society there are historical and philosophical principles which compose the staple of an educational requirement, leaving the physical sciences to shift somewhat for themselves. . . . it is logical for this society to give an educational preference to certain professions which are peculiarly committed to its defense [the Church, the bar, and the higher teaching profession].³

The charge that the South was intellectually insular, inhospitable to new ideas, seems to have persisted into the twentieth century; Davidson, for instance, took care to point out that young Southerners were reading, and unfortunately being influenced by liberal ideas and iconoclastic critiques:

Students in colleges and universities--where one naturally expects the forward things of intellectual progress--are being systematically exposed to the heresies of scientific

¹ Jefferson Davis, p. 30.

² "The South Defends Its Heritage," p. 112.

³ Ibid.

and literary courses. The mental temper of the young gentlemen (and the young ladies, by all means!) is alert and quite sensitive, almost too joyously responsive, indeed, to what might be called alien influences. They are familiar with the pages and preaching of liberal Northern journals. They are, for better or worse, much inveigled by the jeremiads of Mr. Mencken, and are often led to imitate him. They have read Mr. Cabell and Mr. Sinclair Lewis. They have fished in strange waters of sociology and economics. Many of them have brushed against the philosophers from Plato to Dewey.¹

Consequently, it is a mistake to assume that opportunities to experience new ideas will be absent in the South: "Anti-evolution statutes are straw barriers against a great wind."² For Davidson, far more important than illiteracy figures as evidence of the South's educational position was the realization that her institutions have produced leaders who have maintained her spiritual values:

Southern educational institutions are the nuclei from which ideas work outward, impregnating the commonwealth of social thought. From them come editors, preachers, statesmen, and especially writers. . . . you have an indication of resident spiritual forces that outweigh all the statistics of literacy or illiteracy that you may wish to compile.³

Views on Religion

On the subject of religion the concurrence of views was fundamental but less explicit. It was assumed in various

¹"First Fruits of Dayton," 898-899.

²The view that "young intellectuals" of the South were experiencing a "ferment" of ideas from the outside was shared by others. James Southall Wilson, for instance, writing a summary evaluation of Southern poetry for William Braithwaite's Anthology of Magazine Verse for 1926, observed: "The growing prosperity, the rush of the young generation to college, the wider distribution of new educational influences through magazines, books, and easier modes of travel;--all these were both causes and symptoms. The old Shibboleths were losing ground in the South. Much that was fine, much that was beautiful, was going with them; but there was a hearkening to the voices of the present everywhere. Romance was giving place to realism." ["Poetry of the South," p. 61.]

³"First Fruits of Dayton," 900.

defenses of the "Southern" way of life that an agrarian society was by nature a God-centered one; men who were close to the land came to experience the mystery and immutability of a force greater than themselves. God was a being of awesome power. Man's own knowledge of the universe, however great his scientific achievements, is never infinite, is never the whole truth. Theirs was, in essence, a "fundamentalist" position, but their focus was aesthetic and intellectual, not the simple literalness of the snakehandlers or the frontier evangelists. The defense of religious "orthodoxy" (which was carefully explained or re-defined) took the form of an attack on the commercial and materialistic forces which were, in their view, causes for the degeneration and decline of religion. The tendency in modern society to make religion "useful" or "profitable" was deplored. Science was not, and should not be, a substitute for faith in an inscrutable Power.

The most explicit and comprehensive statement of such a religious philosophy came in John Crowe Ransom's God Without Thunder, published a few months before the symposium but probably teased into expression as a result of the issues raised by the Scopes trial.¹ The representation of the conflict between the forces of religion and science in terms of an opposition between bigotry and enlightenment resulted in a conscious re-evaluation of a Christian heritage. In looking back on this period of activity, Davidson suggested that the Dayton affair was significant in crystallizing certain ideas expressed throughout I'll Take My Stand and more specifically in Ransom's God Without Thunder:

Between these two events there was something more, perhaps, than a merely symbolical connection. I can hardly speak for others, but for John Ransom and myself, surely, the Dayton episode dramatized, more ominously than any other event easily could, how difficult it was to be a Southerner in the twentieth century, and how much more difficult to be a Southerner and also a writer. . . . Out of the bold

¹For a fuller discussion of the importance of the Dayton affair in the development of the symposium, see pp. 202 ff. below, and Appendix E.

and somewhat grim conviction of such moments, I should guess, grew the exacting study and thought that went into the composition of Ransom's great book about science and religion. . . .¹

The aesthetic and agrarian impulse which motivated Ransom to his "unorthodox defense of orthodoxy" is suggested in a letter he wrote Tate while he was working on his book:

It is just as you say: Religion is fundamental and prior to intelligent (or human) conduct in any plane. . . . Religion is the only effective defense against Progress, and our very vicious economic system; against empire and against socialism, or any other political foolishness. It is our only guarantee of security and--an item that seems to me to carry a good deal of persuasive power--the enjoyment of life. The fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom; a big beginning, but only a beginning, of which the end is the love of the Lord. Substitute Nature for the Lord and he won't feel aggrieved.

[July 4, 1929]

Religion, like art, was to be deeply experienced. It was not to be utilitarian, for thus man takes the mystery out of his universe, or seeks primarily to control the forces of nature. The God of Ransom's God Without Thunder was a supernatural, not a natural being: "We may refer to him as a God, a Person, a Mind, an Intelligence, a Purpose, an Agent, an Activity, a Force, a Principle--but he is necessarily behind, over, above, in, or under nature. . . ." [p. 14] Modern thinkers who attempt to make a religion of science, treating Principles as the new God succeed primarily in creating a limited God that works according to laws discoverable and calculable by man. Gods, whether pagan or Christian, in Ransom's view, have major advantages over Principles:

In the first place, the Gods are concrete, they have sensible quality, they furnish us with aesthetic experience. . . . The scientific processes are terribly confining. They crucify our organic sensibility while they drive furiously towards their abstract, and their exclusive aspects. Science as a mental habit is an obsession which is quite unhealthy. . . . In the second place, . . .

¹"Counterattack, 1930-1940," pp. 40-41.

Gods are better than Principles in the respect that legislation is always superior in the practical sense when it is specific.

[pp. 83-84]

The reason for Ransom's careful distinction between God and Principle, as an object of belief, is made apparent in his definition of religion and its function. For him, it is a body of doctrine which not only defines God and man's relation to God but also seeks to define the intent of the universe and man's proper function in it; man's religious belief constitutes his fundamental philosophy and consequently is the determining influence upon his conduct.¹

For Ransom religion is contained in a set of myths that (like the Gods) "attempt to express truths which are not accessible to science."² The qualities which explain the survival--or decay--of a religious myth and which distinguish it from any other myth later appear in somewhat different guises, through the writings of certain agrarians: religion as a myth is more than enjoyed--it is repeated over and over, spontaneously and in ritual, held firmly as a guide to conduct, and passionately defended and fought for. But it must be (1) important, (2) vivid and energetic, (3) appropriate to our taste and cultural heritage, and (4) institutionalized--a social possession. In discussing these requirements, Ransom reveals his basic criticism of modern religion: that its great values of the past have degenerated, that the aesthetic and spiritual experience it offered was being secularized. An "important" religious myth requires a God "cosmic in dimensions," a God "fully equipped with his thunderbolts: . . . Without this provision no religion," Ransom asserts, "will have much of a life."

This fact is proved today: the softer and more benevolent the representation of the God of Christendom, the more he is neglected, the less need of him the believers find they have. The importance of the God takes in not only

¹ God Without Thunder, p. 3.

² Ibid., p. 11.

his physical magnitude, . . . but also his inscrutable variety and the uncertainty of his favor.

[pp. 86-87]

To be "vivid and energetic," a religion must offer a concrete myth. Many persons want a religion which will not be scorned by anthropologists as "the foolishness of primitive supernaturalism," with the result that they attempt "to have a God without having any God in particular":

A myth which has flourished once will perish when its devotees become too squeamish, and begin peeling off its wrappings of concrete detail, saying that they are interested only in the "heart" of its mystery--but finding in the end that the heart which they arrive at is only an abstract essence that has no blood in it. The modern preacher now addresses his public prayer to an abstraction, and is careful not to require of the worshipers more than the minimum of that indignity that consists in entertaining a lively image of God. In this way the priest abdicates his function--though I do not doubt but that it often seems to the priest that he must choose between losing his myth and losing his constituency.

[p. 88]

The third requirement of a religious myth represents the Scylla to the Charybdis of concreteness. "It is probably in vain that we try to compel ourselves to go against the grain and profess our faith in a myth that arouses some powerful antipathy because of its peculiar associations." However superior a religious myth may be, if it does not suit us racially and culturally, we cannot respond to it sympathetically. Satisfying this requirement creates, in a sense, the dilemma faced by the agrarians who were also intellectuals. Men who were not close to nature found it difficult to accept a religious myth predicated on faith in the inscrutability of a God who had created nature.¹ Nor was a simple, literal acceptance of the Bible possible for anyone educated in the modern sociological and biological sciences. Ransom's comments suggest the dilemma but do not explicitly deal with its implications; instead, he takes refuge in the remote past:

¹Ransom explicitly indicates that environment and experience help to explain the difference in the conception of God and the nature of the religious myth held by the

We are now living in cities, for the most part. Not only do we not live in an agricultural society, but the agricultural life has come to be held in a certain scorn. We could not therefore, probably, if we were perfect creatures of our age, accept with relish as the appropriate symbol of omnipotence a mere Rain-God, or a God of vegetation. We have no longer any particular relations with the beasts, and we could not care for totemism, or a myth which defined God as an animal. . . .

I must say this too: there are Gentiles who cannot readily adapt themselves to a myth which is Jewish in its coloring; and Occidentals who cannot adapt themselves to imagery which is too rich and foreign in an "Oriental" way.

We cannot hope to find our religious expression in a religion which causes us to blush. And this is most embarrassing. I do not know of situations much more painful than that of wishing to take part in a religious institution and feeling not quite able to go through with it, because of some massive but indistinct repulsion or disgust, which comes we do not know why.

[pp. 89-90]

The final requirement for a religious myth--that it be "institutionalized, or become a social possession"--is, in Ransom's view the climax of its development and constitutes an inherent element of an agrarian society. For a recognition of the infiniteness of God and the finiteness of man could be no mere idiosyncrasy; it was a faith practiced and shared by a community: "A religion is the possession of a society. . . . And part of the meaning of a religion for the individual is in

city-dweller in contrast to the farmer: "The modern American city or industrial district is certainly the most impressive transformation of natural environment that has yet appeared on this planet. It is no wonder that it tickles its inhabitants so pleasantly with the sense of their ruthless domination of nature, and the ease with which they can manage its God.

But any city, even a small city of the old Jewish world, approaches this degree of transformation. Its effect is to insulate its inhabitants against observation of a fact . . .: the infinite variety of nature. The agricultural population is constantly aware of this fact, and accordingly its temper differs from the temper of industrialists and city-folk: it is humble, religious, and conservative. Its God is inscrutable. The nature it knows is not the nature that city-folk think they have mastered. Neither in the manner of their habitations nor in the forms of their occupation do the city folk make contact with elemental nature. . . ." [Ibid., p.125.]

his sense of this fact. . . . Our devotion to the myth is not finished except in the knowledge of the social sanction behind it."¹

These observations suggest not only that Ransom is attacking science and the effects of the secularization of orthodox faith, but also that he is constructing a philosophical framework for a re-definition of fundamentalism. Thus, he is able to support the forces of religious orthodoxy in the Scopes trial without leaving himself open to the charge of naiveté or bigotry. For Ransom "all first-class religionists are Fundamentalists"² whose distinguishing characteristics are a commitment to a myth and an acceptance of that myth without constantly questioning its correspondence to reality. But there are good and bad Fundamentalists; the bad Fundamentalists Ransom disavows, while asserting that their simple views do no great harm and probably will serve them better than would a code of their own devising:

These bad or simple Fundamentalists [in intelligence] are the mercenaries of the religious army--they fight expecting to take their pay in hard quick coin.

They provoke the sneers of the naturalists, and quite properly. They have never understood the God whom they profess. They think he is a natural cause who can be touched, and persuaded to govern natural events for them. They think they have a way of access to his favor. It is quite as miserable a piece of thinking as any natural scientist cares to call it.

And they deceive themselves. But luckily, they do themselves no great harm by their religious observances. The religion which they serve is never, one would imagine, of their own invention: it has been created and elaborated by wider men: the commandments it entails make a better thing out of the lives of the ignorant than their own devices would be likely to do. The office which a religion fulfills for a society is to inform its members of what expectations they can reasonably cherish in this life; and the mercenaries who serve religion do not get precisely the reward which they claim, but do get a code, an occupation, and a career.

[p. 102]

The God Ransom sought to defend and re-vitalize was

¹Ibid., p. 90.

²Ibid., p. 95.

Calvinistic--a God of wrath and judgment, a God in whose universe evil existed, not merely well-meaning, soft benevolence or abstract principle. On both the philosophical and popular levels Ransom found a decline, a watering down of the hard religious myth that placed man in a right relationship with nature. Religionists, in coming to a "perfect understanding" with anti-religionists, are losing the battle:

The priests themselves have lost heart and are not handing on the priestly tradition. They have in effect come to this arrangement with the naturalists: "If you will leave us the name and honor of our Gods, we will surrender to you their powers and see that you are not interfered with in your naturalism and your secularism."

That is the intent of the new theology, which makes Christ¹ supreme over all other Gods. For Christ is the spirit of the scientific and ethical secularism of the West.

[p. 320]

The result, Ransom concludes, is that "faith is disintegrating from within: it is not only the victim of enemies without."² The need for the Western world, as Ransom sees it, is to work within existing religious institutions and "do what we can to recover the excellences of the ancient faith."³ But the way to recovery is not to enter the Synagogue (admirable though the God of Israel is, Ransom finds this possibility "abhorrent"--"a man is a member of his own race, or his own tribe"⁴); not to return to Rome (although some of his friends were doing so and although he might be able to overcome his prejudices, his community would not); not to become an Anglican (even though he is an Anglophile, he personally senses inarticulate but deep social and political reasons for not

¹Ransom's view of Christ is clearly not Christian in an orthodox sense. Defined as a "Demigod" (along with Satan), a Man-God who represents the highest human development, Christ is to represent the Logos, the "Patron of Science; the Reason which governs the universe so far as the universe is amenable to science in modern terms, the Uniformity of Nature upon which scientists lean so heavily . . . a Friend of Secularism!" [*Ibid.*, p. 155.]

²*Ibid.*, p. 323.

³*Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 326.

turning away from his heritage); perhaps not even to accept "the religion that will be the expression of the social solidarity of my own community":

There is Presbyterianism; and Methodism; and Baptistry; there are plenty of other sectarian possibilities. These bodies are evidently close to the genius of my kind of community. But they have declined rather far from orthodoxy, as I see it--and as what Western religious body has not? They secularize themselves more and more every day. It is hard to give them an endorsement.

[p. 327]

Given the tendency toward greater and greater mechanization of society, the answer is to set up two objectives, however incompatible one appears to be with the other: first, to find a religion "to which the private individual could be . . . intensely loyal, to Gods whom he may fear and love, and whose commandments represent for him the deepest wisdom"; second, to seek a religion which has "the sanction of his own natural society."¹ These were to become basic elements in an agrarian society.

The preference for a "fundamentalist" position, given the alternative of secularism, had been justified by Davidson as inherently "Southern" several years before Ransom's extended analysis. Like Ransom, he had recognized a kind of fundamentalism which could be properly criticized; but like Ransom, too, he found a poetic quality in such a position that deserved to survive:

Fundamentalism, in one aspect, is blind and belligerent ignorance; in another, it represents a fierce clinging to poetic supernaturalism against the encroachments of cold logic; it stands for moral seriousness. The Southerner should hesitate to scorn these qualities, for, however much they may now be perverted to bigoted and unfruitful uses, they belong in the bone and sinew of his nature as they once belonged to Milton who was both Puritan and Cavalier. To obscure them by a show of sophistication is to play the coward: to give them a positive transmutation is the highest function of art. . . .²

¹ Ibid., p. 327.

² "The Artist as Southerner," p. 783.

In Davidson's long poem, The Tall Men, certain religious attitudes emerge: recognition of the degeneration of religious beliefs, acknowledgment of the sincerity of evangelical religion although it is inadequate for a questioning intellect, re-affirmation of faith in a God of nature. The degeneration of religious faith in modern society is suggested in the conclusion of the first section celebrating the history and heroism of the "tall men" of Tennessee:

Seven o'clock in the twentieth century is
 The hour of supper, not the hour of prayer,
 And something (call it civilization) turns
 A switch; a fan hums pianissimo,
 Blowing old ghosts to outer darkness where
 The bones of tall men lie in the Tennessee earth.
[pp. 16-17]

This was the period of "Coolidge prosperity," the period when the "new Southerner" was eagerly seeking to share the wealth in Big Business, when the full impact of disintegrated ideals erupted in doubts and fragmented personalities. "The Faring," a section of the poem on World War I, depicts among the survivors a Corporal Simmons who asks:

What am I, the son of a Methodist preacher,
 A follower of Christ, doing here? Cleaning
 Something that looks like blood from my rifle-barrel
 And singing: 'There is a fountain filled with blood.'
[p. 61]

The war has left a modern Southerner, now back in Tennessee, haunted with nightmares, seeking futilely an answer in his orthodox faith, finally turning to whatever Faustian illusory comfort he can find in the forces of Satan:

Have I prayed to God? Am I washed in the Blood of the Lamb
 In vain? I am red with sin. Or is it the flesh
 Raw and stained with my own blood that shows?
 Can blood then wash out blood? I'll have no blood,
 But rather the potion of a different magic
 To make me whole. God has poor ears. They are clogged
 With pontifical wax. Then what of an antique Devil
 Whose clean and pointed ears prick artfully up
 At my first softest whisper? Magic conquers
 Here while the room is turning, and the brain

Is metttled from its wounds for drugs and fancy.
 Shadows may beg deliverance of shadows,
 And I who sleepless groan beg sweet illusion
 Whether from Hell or not. Good Devil, hear!

The walls blur and move, dissolving in cloud.
 Night is alive with forms to comfort me. . . .¹

To the importunate request of the "horrificed sufferer" appears
 "a black-browed prince . . . like a circus ringmaster" who of-
 fers a movie--"Reel One--Disease of Modern Man"--a "private
 service, guaranteed / For invalid souls who are in need / Of
 losing themselves." The action depicts a modern Southerner
 in his religious and hypocritically moral milieu:

This is Rupert of the House
 Of Rupert, famed in history,
 Pondering on his income tax,
 Deducting genealogy.

.

God is purveyed in little chips,
 Snatched at and scattered in a quarrel.
 The Church, aware of nakedness,
 Parades in posters and a barrel.

The guardians of the public eye
 Abhor the sin in which we wallow,
 And, wearing double lenses, knit
 Fig-leaves for Venus and Appollo.

[pp. 73, 74-75]

A critique on the failure of religion finally to control the
 inborn sinfulness of man, his lustfulness in one guise, is
 represented in the movie-reel character, "Satyr in a Tuxedo."
 Christianity in various appearances--its founding as a church,
 its scholastic divines, and its Protestant impulse (before
 dwindling to hypocritical, quarreling sects)--for a time kept
 in check man's sinful impulses; but in the aftermath of World
 War I with its disintegrating values, the "natural" man in-
 dulged in whatever pleasures of the flesh he desired:

Bacchus and Silenus betrayed me,
 Paul and Peter caught and waylaid me,
 Dunstan and Augustine unmade me
 With book and candle.

¹"Conversation in a Bedroom," The Tall Men, pp. 70-71.

Corinth and Ephesus deserted me,
 Provence and Aquitaine perverted me,
 Calvin and Wesley seized and converted me
 On pain of hell.

Adopted a Presbyterian snuffle,
 Survived a Methodist cloak and muffle,
 And came to life in the general scuffle
 Of creed on creed.

Displaying now a goat's foot cockily,
 Swigging out of the old flask rockily.
 Shoved and yet unbudging stockily,
 I prance at need.

[pp. 80-81]

Within the sections "The Breaking Mould" and "Resurrection" Davidson represents the religious doubts¹ of a Southerner for whom neither a childhood faith nor an evangelical simplicity of belief, however good and sincere, seems adequate. But even though this Southerner cannot intellectually find the answers for his questions in orthodox beliefs or organized churches, he accepts through the beauty of nature, the continuity of life, and the greatness of man himself, a faith in a power or being greater than himself, indescribable though it may be. The mystery, the ineluctableness of God remain. An evangelical faith with its focus on sin and its message of personal salvation through Christ offers no explanation of the mystery and awesomeness of nature, of the seeming indifference of a Creator; it does not speak to this modern Southerner:

And to me Evangelist came again in the blare
 Of a cornet under a canvas tent, a borrowed
 Piano tinkling a washed-out music, a sweating
 Choir vaguely exalting the youthful blood
 Of sinners--

Brother, are you a Christian? Are you
Washed in the Blood? Oh, Brother, sinful Brother,
Come while the choir sings Number Seventy-nine
And give me your hand. God bless you, Brother. God
Bless you, young man. Will there be any stars,
Any stars in my crown when at evening . . .

When at evening, I, a man conceived in sin,
 Walked, unthoughtful of sin, I saw overhead

¹ These were omitted from the revised version of The Tall Men published in 1938.

Vega, against the murk of space, and Mars,
 A reddish bulb swung closer to this globe
 By a few million miles. And Ursa Major
 Hurlled west against the beating of my heart
 Forever. I said, the sun will rise and dawn
 Will break again forever. The moon will turn
 Its dry face toward the clutching earth, and men
 Will walk as I have walked and ask the same
 Clean question of a God that never answers. . . .
 [pp. 88-89]

The answers offered by men in sects and creeds to explain death and the nature of God do not satisfy this man's personal needs for a God:

Then say not, death, I shall not clench this hand
 Tomorrow . . . tomorrow I shall not see this sky.
 Say not tomorrow this bright urgency
 Of looks and words must pass. Oh, come away, death!
 I who have had no ending cannot know
 What it is to end. I who have had no beginning
 Know life only. Beyond, by either way,
 Is God, whose answer has not come to men
 But in the rumors of men--a gipsy race
 Who flaunt their pride in legends of old glory
 Half-forgotten, repeated as a charm
 For comfort's sake when wind blows cold and death
 Stands at the road's edge, a shadow beckoning Stop.

But still men dare to speak for God and shape
 Their fumbling answers into a mould to keep
 The quick proud spirit against the outer dread
 Of spaceless terrible things. God is the mould
 So many times cast off, so many times
 Clay on the wheel again. For if ever the soul
 Moves in its changeful dreams, the mould must break.
 It is my restless soul that stirs. It is
 My soul that will not be contained in the dead
 Plaster that other hands have made. It is cramped
 And like a child within the womb it must
 Begone from that which gave it life. It rends,
 It cleaves its way, and there is agony.

But if I pass you, O House of God,
 It is not now in scorn. I would not sit
 In the seat of the scornful or walk in the way of sinners.
 But men are greater than the house they build
 Even the House of God. And the prayers of men
 Are mightier than the altars where they bow
 Their wounded heads in one eternal wish.
 I seek the joy of life. I seek the God
 Who will not tame the manliness of men. [pp. 89-91.

The dilemma of this Southerner is to reconcile three facets of

his religious being. No mould, created by man, can do it. He is a man "with pagan blood"--he finds (unlike Ransom) the Hebrew God, the God with thunder, an alien one. He is also a Protestant, brought up in the devout ways of church for which he is profoundly grateful:

The second man of me is Puritan
 Who learned of a godly mother the Ten Commandments
 And read the Good Book through at the age of twelve,
 Chapter by chapter. The hymns of country choirs
 Haunt my tongue. The words of stately men
 Speaking from ghostly pulpits forbid me still
 From shameful things. And youthful prayers arise
 Unbidden to my lips in hours of dread.
 Woman is sacred still, and wine is a mocker,
 The words of God are written in the Book
 Which I will keep beloved though earth may speak
 A different language unto those who read her.¹

[p. 92]

It is, however, in the third aspect of his religious character that this Southerner asks questions as a man with reason, and finds an answer in what seems to be an agnostic's position; he does not deny the possibility of an incomprehensible Being, perhaps an impersonal force, but what man thinks will not determine His existence or non-existence:

The third man was born to weigh the sun
 And love the clean cool sureties of matter.
 Whatever God is, this man does not guess.
 He is content to know what all things do
 Or can be made to do. How little is man,
 He thinks, reckoning the life of stars, and yet
 How easily things beneath the stars may serve
 This little man's great will. No question shows
 The cause behind a cause, for ever there are
 Unmeasured causes still. He had rather walk
 The observant friend of the world as it looks to be,
 And move with it among all active things,
 Using them all, or maybe used by them.
 And if he die--why, many men have died!
 And what is God? Well, what He is, He is--
 Some Great Electron, not yet trapped or seen,
 But there or not, whatever our debates.

[p. 93]

¹ The first two lines of this passage were revised slightly in the 1938 version: "The second man of me is Methodist, / Who learned of a gentle mother the Ten Commandments."

Whatever hope this Southerner has, is in the continuity of life in nature, in the love shared by a man and woman, in the survival of human personality, in the achievements of men who have lived before. Here is no "orthodox" Christian position, certainly; Christ is not the Resurrection for Man. Here is not even the unorthodox orthodoxy of Ransom. Nevertheless, there is an affirmation of something beyond the purely material, a spiritual reality in nature which is eternal:

"I am the Resurrection and the Life."
Sayeth the smell of wild plum-blossoms tossed
Fragrantly on the scragged hill, a cloud
Swaying the mild traveler, commanding peace.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life,"
Sayeth the slender form of the young girl
Whose hour is April-- . . .
April attends her,
Month of the swelling seed that break the husk
Of rotting silence where her body moves.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life,"
Sayeth the crumbling step of a lordly man
Whose back the winters cannot bow, but still
He lifts old slumbrous eyes against the heights
Unscalable, where gray importunate captains
Beckon, to meet new dooms, their risen hosts.

... he goes
Crying with swift unutterable looks,
Remember me! O proud young sons, believe!
For whosoever liveth and believeth in me
Shall not compose the fallen dust but flow
Into my beauty, an everlasting flame . . .

. . . But here [back home]
The power is and glory. Here arise,
Like exhalations out of earth and stone,
The walls we build, the roofs that cover us
Beneath us tier on tier are locked in mould
The bones of those who fought and loved here once
Like us, who fight and love. Builders of mounds
Have given their secret unto earth and gone
A thousand years. Under these floors and fields
The Red Men are who walked as blithe as we
In this warm sun. And here their enemies,
The tall men, lie within the land they won.
And now the flesh of warriors, builders, friends,
White man and negro, slave and master, thief

And hero, conquered and conqueror,
 Makes rich the ground whereon we build and move
 To our own conquest, no less hard than theirs,
 Perhaps not less heroic. Out of their death
 Leaps now our life, out of decay the flash
 Of this high moment, out of the shadow, light.¹
 [pp. 106-110]

The God of Davidson's Southerner in the 1927 version of The Tall Men is a God found in nature and man, not the God represented in the orthodox, organized Christian churches. Although the views of Davidson and Ransom as expressed in two very different forms of literature were sharply divergent in approach, in neither work was there a denial of the importance of the spiritual; and for both men, nature embodied this spiritual reality. By June of 1928 in an essay on the effects of the Dayton trial, Davidson commented:

Consider, too, that Fundamentalism, whatever its wild extravagances, is at least morally serious in a day when morals are treated with levity; and that it offers a sincere, though a narrow solution to a major problem of our age: namely, how far science, which is determining our physical ways of life, shall be permitted also to determine our philosophy of life. . . .²

In "August Revival: Crosby Junction" Robert Penn Warren also represents a conflict. The fervid preaching of the evangelical preacher fails to speak to modern youth who seek a faith for the needs of living man. Published a few months after the Scopes trial, the poem is distinguished by sharply etched concrete details through which Warren embodied the rebellion of youth:

Wheat is threshed and cut the heavy clover;
 Seedtime with sinful spring was over.
 No more to do and nowhere else to go
 They pack the varnished benches row on row,

¹This portion of The Tall Men, a section called "Resurrection," was omitted by Davidson when he made revisions for a 1938 edition, published in Lee in the Mountains and Other Poems.

²"First Fruits of Dayton," 898.

Puddling thick air with the yellow palm-leaf fan,
 Attentive to history of the Son of Man
 Who died for them. On the oaken organ top,
 Withered, the red geranium petals drop

Slowly, as dropped unto the dust dark blood
 Slowly, as drop the words of him who would
 The passionate priestly office exercise,
 Spreading gaunt arms that he may dramatize

For these, the stiff-necked sinful and Pharisee,
 The Cross, the essence of the agony.
 So still the bleeding hands extend and still
 The Cross subdues the dark place of the skull.

Enough--O you behind the pulpit there,
 You Peter with long hands and thinning hair!
 Enough, old man! Eat, sleep, for you are old,
 And your chronicle too weary to be told.

Wheat is threshed and cut the heavy clover
 But tall the corn stands; harvest is not over.
 Let the corn be cut; for bellies there must be bread,
 And sleep for men that be not living, not dead.

So wake them not lest they ask too much, too much,
 And touch no more the broken feet, nor touch
 The piteous brown fingers in the shroud.
 Let them so be; and cry no more aloud,

But let the serpent coil in the dry winepress,
 The lank hare's foot disturb the withering grass,
 Let young foxes be gnawing the hare's worn skull
 And the owl hoot from the olive tree on the hill!

Let the city sleep--roofs are white in the moon--
 And sleep the young wild head within the stone;
 Let the legionary shiver and tramp outside,
 Forgetful to-night what manner of man has died.¹

While the attitude toward religion in "August Revival" clearly is not "orthodox" nor is it Ransom's view, neither is it anti-religious. The sharpness of the criticism seems motivated in part by a sense of regret that what religion has become is no longer adequate for man's human and spiritual needs.

Like Ransom and Davidson, John Gould Fletcher was also at the same time deploring what seemed to him a degradation of religious belief and expression in America. His sketch of the American "character" implicitly indicts the tendency to make worship or faith a business proposition:

¹ Sewanee Review, XXXIII (October-December, 1925), 439.

The sermon is to the American . . . , a special talisman, something enabling him to carry on his life, get his business done, clear up his relations with women, regulate his activity. Hence the enormous popularity in recent America of sermons dealing with the conduct of one's business. Hence the upholding of Jesus and the Apostles as typical "go-getters" and even efficiency experts; the culmination of which is in such a recent book as "The Man Nobody Knows" where Christ becomes a prototype of the typical American advertising agent!

The Americans tend more and more to substitute "uplift" in place of religion--and the hankerings of the mystically-minded (mostly the least literate and least economically independent, therefore the least powerful) among them, pass unheard. . . . The belief that has emerged out of such a creed, resolutely held, may be briefly summarised as a faith that the increase of business, higher wages, and more prosperity on the American model will definitely save the world.¹

Yet the values to be found in an organized religious faith were not completely denied by others of the group. John Donald Wade, whose biography of John Wesley, founder of the faith of his family, wrote of Methodism in 1930:

Non-Calvinistic, Methodism was fitted for the South; freshly romantic in its exultation of the common man, it was fitted for the East; progressively uncereemonious, dynamic, it was fitted for the Frontier. And at last, before the retroactive influence of the Frontier was exhausted, it was fitted for all America--and for a world disposed to follow America. . . .²

In his earlier book on A. E. Longstreet, which gave an account of the opposition of sects during the evangelistic movement of the 1830's Wade found a value in church affiliation:

There were indeed, however, hidden in this welter of morbid inhibitions and violent controversy, spiritual implications of a very noble and exhilarating sort. By joining the church, people meant to signify that they were citizens of a world other than the one they had been citizens of formerly, that their standard of values was no longer a material one.³

A strong religious faith was, almost by definition, a necessary agrarian value; men who were close to the soil, who were in harmony with nature, lived in spiritual expectations rather than for material goals.

¹The Two Frontiers, pp. 158-159.

²John Wesley, p. xi. ³A. E. Longstreet, p. 106.

And a church affiliation, or at least the authority of dogma, if not denigrated by the influences of industrialism, was of moral and spiritual value. For several of them, an affiliation with a church was an inherent part of religion; without the authority of dogma as support and reinforcement, morality was in danger of dwindling into private, irresponsible conduct. Modern man needs the strength to be derived from religion, provided it has not been corrupted by the industrial spirit.

Views on Economics

By their own confession, the core of the agrarian group was not informed on economics. Coming to a consideration of the economic problems of the South by way of poetry and literary criticism, the former Fugitives of the group gradually realized, as the chaos of 1929 threatened, that their world of letters was not and could not be isolated from the world of "practical" affairs. And the violent attacks on the South as a backward and reactionary region forced them to widen their horizons, to look about them and take account of what was happening in and to their region. Yet, before they had consciously conceived of I'll Take My Stand and the polemical essays that followed as a means of defense and attack, most of them had little to say concretely on the South's economic problems. Even Frank Owsley, who had been devoting himself to a study of the economic causes and issues of the Civil War, observed at the Fugitive Reunion in 1956 that "I'm sure we [Agrarians] were not enough economists, then or now--nor was anyone else--to fathom the mysteries of the way of life in terms of economics that will carry on those basic values." Their revolt, he added, "was a philosophy, not an economy."¹ And Robert Penn Warren, at the same occasion, commented, "I was no economist and didn't fancy myself as one."

Quite apart from this explicit admission, it is possible to infer from their articles and books preceding the

¹Fugitives' Reunion, p. 206.

symposium¹ that the economic context for their defense of Southern tradition was abstract, generalized, and philosophical. No statistical evidence was presented to support their plea that the retention of an agrarian way of life was appropriate for the South; no figures were cited of mill workers' average wages, for instance, to suggest the exploitative character of industrialism. They were not sociologists in their approach to economic or sociological problems. Theirs was the technique of literary men: suffused with the aesthetic impulse, they treated manifestations of economic problems in terms of clusters of dichotomies, almost as symbols. The abstractions which they attacked--science, progress, commercialization, materialism and the artificial--were linked with the concept of industrialism. Agrarianism, on the other hand, was defended for its stability: as a way of life it permitted gradual adoption of and adaptation to change and made possible the development of spiritual and aesthetic values.

Ransom, for example, recognized the seriousness of the Southern farmer's problem and agreed that it was just one aspect of a nation-wide situation: "The Southern problem is very complicated, but at its center is the farmer's problem, and this problem is simply the most acute version of that general agrarian problem which inspires the despair of many thoughtful Americans to-day."² The solution, for Ransom, did not lie in industrialism, or even in adapting an industrial technique to farming. The demand that men work with machines is "unnatural," whereas the wish to live close to the land is inherent:

¹It should be pointed out here that the contributors to the symposium who were most likely to have discussed the economic situation in the South published very little before 1930, or at any rate, very little that is now available. The bulk of the writing done by the group lay in the areas of literary criticism, book reviews (especially of poetry, novels, and biographies), art and theater criticism, and specialized or limited historical problems.

²"The South Defends Its Heritage," p. 114.

The agrarian discontent in America is deeply grounded in the love of the tiller of the soil, which is probably, I must confess, not peculiar to the Southern specimen but one of the more ineradicable human attachments, be the tiller as progressive as he may. In proposing to wean men of this foolish attachment, industrialism sets itself against the most ancient and humane of all the modes of human livelihood.¹

Ransom acknowledged a criticism of Southern agricultural practice--that the breaking up of plantations after the war into small farms was no solution to the South's economic devastation, since the yields from the smaller farms were continually decreasing; however, the proposed solution of consolidating these small farms he considered a cure worse than the disease: "These units will be industrial units, controlled by a board of directors or an executive rather than a squire, worked with machinery, and manned not by farmers living at home but by 'labor'"²--precisely what the Agrarians were to criticize in the factory system then being established through the South.

What interested these future Agrarians were not the implications of various developments--that about forty-five per cent of the farmers, for instance, were tenants or sharecroppers by 1930, or that unhappy farmers were a ready source of cheap labor for industries being enticed to locate in the South, or that the hope of maintaining a subsistence farm was becoming more remote as farmers went into debt and had to rely on credit and bank loans. They were, instead, more concerned with presenting the theory of an agrarian life, with delineating the character of the true agrarian, with extolling agrarian values--in short, they discussed agrarianism as a philosophy rather than the economics of farming as a practice:

But the farmer who is not a mere laborer, even the farmer of the comparatively new places like Iowa and Nebraska, is necessarily among the more stable and less progressive elements of society. He refuses to mobilize himself and become a unit in the industrial army because he does not approve of army life.

. . . He identifies himself with a spot of ground, and

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

this ground carries a good deal of meaning: it defines itself for him as nature. He would not till it too hurriedly and not too mechanically to observe in it the contingency and the infinitude of nature; and so his life acquires its philosophical and even its cosmical consciousness. A man can contemplate and explore, respect and love an object as substantial as a farm or a native province. But he cannot contemplate or explore, respect nor love a mere turnover, such as an assemblage of "natural resources," a pile of money, a volume of produce, a market, or a credit system. It is into precisely these intangibles that industrialism would translate the farmer's farm. It means the dehumanization of his life.¹

Working close to the land imparts to man a perspective based on the realization of his own finiteness: "I believe it is demonstrable that there is possible no deep sense of beauty, no heroism of conduct, no sublimity of religion, which is not informed by the humble sense of man's precarious position in the universe."² Thus in man's proper relation to the soil, the amenities and non-material values of life are made possible; "out of so simple a thing as respect for the physical earth and its teeming life comes a primary joy, which is an inexhaustible source of arts and religions and philosophies."³

If a label is to be attached to this sketchily enunciated economic system, it would be "Jeffersonian."⁴ Andrew Lytle's description of the Jeffersonian economic theory in his biography of Bedford Forrest might be considered--in its theoretical aspects--a representation of the philosophical view of the Agrarians:

Jefferson had said that the pursuit of happiness was possible only where every man owned the fields he worked. Then, and then only, was he beholden to no other, for he could house, clothe, feed, and warm his family by his

¹ Ibid., pp. 114-15.

² John Crowe Ransom, "The South--Old or New?" p. 142.

³ Ibid., p. 141.

⁴ When Ransom was asked by Clinton Rossiter of Cornell (who was then working on Conservatism in America) what sort of economy the Agrarians represented, Ransom replied, "decidedly the Jeffersonian." (Fugitives' Reunion, p. 207.)

labors. This self-reliance was not possible where men hired out to the factory masters, for at that moment their living became dependent upon the will of another.¹

The future Agrarians sought an economy based on small, independently owned farms, operated by self-sufficient farmers. They envisioned a shift from large planters to small yeomen farmers, or to the landed gentry--in Ransom's phrase, a "squirearchy"--which made possible loosely graduated but not fixed social orders, and a social and economic structure that not only permitted but encouraged friendly personal relations.² Jefferson's encomium to the farmer--"Those who labor in the earth are the chosen of God if ever he had a chosen people"--was reinforced by much of the Agrarians' polemics. And certainly they echoed, a century and a half later, his fear of the corrupting influence of "manufactures" on the body politic, although they added to their expression of distrust a critique of the effect of an industrial society on the individual personality.

The agrarian anti-industrial bias, which includes the concomitant features of science, progress, and commercialization, has already been sufficiently discussed in theoretical terms to require no further amplification. However, the attack on industrialism as a basis of an economic system might be further considered. Again, it was John Crowe Ransom who was most explicit and detailed. His attack in God Without Thunder had a dual focus: against those aspects of finance capitalism which reveal both its inherent fallacies and its inadequacies in satisfying the economic needs of man; and against those unfortunate effects on man who wishes to be more than an economic animal.

Industrialism as it was developing in the early twentieth century was to make the individual worker more insecure, to treat him as a means or a mere tool, to raise

¹Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company, p. 10.

²"The South Defends Its Heritage," p. 112.

efficiency to the level of a value. One of its dangers is over-production, an almost chronic condition, which is the result, Ransom suggested, of the system's necessity to perpetuate itself; thus, certain means of promotion become necessary, inefficacious, parasitic features:

The main concern of industrialists just now is to tempt the consumers into further consumption. . . . The development of advertising--along with that of its twin, personal salesmanship--is an alarming feature of modern industrialism. It is an attempt of an unsound economics to approve itself before men. Without it the rate of production could not possibly be maintained. To bait the hook for the consumer, advertising divests itself easily of scruple and dignity; it is obliged to go behind his spontaneous wants and persuade him to want the good which industry has undertaken to produce. And still it falls short always of its goal, still it fails to bring up the volume of consumption to the volume of possible production.¹

One of the values claimed for the industrial system--that it gives men more leisure time--Ransom found ironically meaningless: "When the machines and the processes shorten the time of our labor, on the ground that labor is evil, they are creating for us a new problem: the problem of leisure. What shall we do with the time we have saved? We are left without a proper career and a natural occupation."²

The agrarian attack on the New South economy was to take the form suggested by Ransom a year before the publication of the symposium; it was an attack in terms of symbols, traditions, history, a frank appeal to a sectional allegiance. One means by which to resist industrialization, Ransom proposed, would be "to arouse sectional feeling of the South to its highest pitch of excitement in defense of all the old ways that are threatened," to give "artificial respiration" to the "resistant attitude of the natives" which will be "fiercest and most effective if industrialism is represented to the Southern people as--what it undoubtedly is for the most part--a foreign invasion of the Southern soil, . . . capable of

¹God Without Thunder, p. 195.

²Ibid.

much more devastation than war wrought when Sherman marched to the sea."¹ This was to be no gentleman's exchange of polite pleasantries but a determined attack that would relate Civil War antipathies to a new invasion:

It will be a great gain if the present peaceful invasion will now and then forget itself by some indiscretion and be less peaceful. . . . It will be in order to proclaim to Southerners that carpetbaggers are again in their midst. And it will be well to seize upon and advertise certain Northern industrial communities as horrible examples of a way of life which Southerners traditionally detest: not failing to point out the human catastrophe which occurs when a Southern village or rural community becomes the cheap labor of a miserable factory system. It will doubtless be a little bit harder to impress the people with the fact that the new so-called industrial slavery not only fastens upon the poor, but blights the middle and better classes too; and to make this point, it may be necessary to revive such a stale antiquity as the old Southern gentleman and his scorn for the dollar chasers and the technical specialists.²

In reconstructing the development of the symposium, Donald Davidson recalled that their ideas on economics stemmed directly from their concern for perpetuating the good life of the Old South, which they felt was inseparable from the agrarian tradition. Their view of economics was, he observed, "at odds with the prevailing schools of economic thought": "We believed that life determines economics, or ought to do so, and that economics is no more than an institution, around the use of which should gather many more motives than economic ones."³

Views on Race

It was Robert Penn Warren who wrote for the symposium the essay on the issue that has distinguished the South historically from all other cultural regions of this country--

¹ "The South Defends Its Heritage," p. 116.

² Ibid.

³ "I'll Take My Stand: A History," pp. 310-11.

the tensions created by the racial problem. The importance of the ~~emancipation~~ as a moral shock to Southerners resulting in "a strange mixture of continuity and discontinuity," taking "new and more exacerbated forms after 1920," became more apparent as industrialism spread through the region. While the "growing self-consciousness of the Negroes opened up possibilities for expanding economic and cultural horizons," at the same time, said Warren, white Southerners' loyalties and pieties--real values--were staked against their religious and moral sense--equally real values. From such a shock or imbalance, from this need to "re-live" or re-define life, he observed, emerged vital imagination.¹ This was Warren's direct confrontation of the issue in 1957; in the decade preceding the publication of the symposium, members of the group were much more oblique in their comments although they did not ignore the race situation.

In general, the views of the future Agrarians were representative of traditional loyalties and were based on historic explanations and justifications of slavery: that it was undesirable in theory, that it had features in practice which were rightly condemned was not denied. But, it was argued, slavery was a system with which the South was unfortunately saddled through the invention of the cotton gin and consequently this form of labor had become economically necessary. Its effects, admittedly, could be morally degrading, to master as well as to slave. But had the South been left alone, slavery probably would have been eliminated gradually. Nor was the Negro so desperately unhappy or inhumanely treated as a slave; indeed, in a land-based society, where the masters were gentlemen, personal relationships were friendly and close, and the slaves were not generally dissatisfied until the agitations of Northern abolitionists treated slavery as an abstract issue. John Donald Wade, for instance, describes A. B. Longstreet's attitude as typical of the best thought of the South toward the Negro:

¹ "The Art of Fiction," Paris Review, p. 123.

As a child, he had learned from his mother that slaves were to be treated with humanity. . . . In selling his own slaves in Augusta he had taken care to dispose of them to a pious and kind master. In defiance of state law, he had taught some of his slaves to write. That he was personally kind and thoughtful is not to be doubted. Also, however, he was condescending and self-righteous in regard to slavery, with a condescension that time has made now almost inconceivable. . . . Realist though he was, it simply did not occur to him that Negroes had rights as imperative as anybody's [Wade refers to forcible marriages]. If a white person was cruel or inconsiderate to negroes he would probably burn in hell for it, but there must be no thought of a negro's present retaliation. Practically, the Judge was right. That other could not exist. The system of slavery forbade the possibility of suggesting that such a course might at times become desirable. Longstreet thought, too, that there was no need of viewing the negro idealistically.¹

One of the strong arguments supporting the claim that Negroes were usually not badly treated was economic. Slaves were an investment, and to beat or to punish them severely in other ways would reduce their value. Warren, to explain why John Brown's raid of Harper's Ferry failed to enlist the support of Negroes and why many of the former slaves continued to stay on their master's plantation through the War and to care for his family focused on the Negro's practical sense of reality:

One fundamental error in the plan of conquest was thinking of slavery in terms of abstract morality, never in more human terms of its practical workings. They [the conspirators] believed every victim of a situation was ready to avenge himself by cutting a throat. The slave himself was at the same time more realistic and more humane; he never bothered his kinky head about the moral issue, and for him the matter simply remained one of convenience or inconvenience. . . . The system was subject to grave abuse, but economic considerations bolstered whatever little decency the slaveholder possessed, for the slave was very valuable property and it was only natural that the master would take care to give his property such treatment as would not jeopardize its value. There was, by consequence, no great reservoir of hate and rancor which at the least opportunity would convert every slave into a soldier; when the war came the masters marched off, leaving

¹ Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, pp. 272-73.

their families and estates in the case of those same negroes for whose liberty, presumably, the North was fighting.¹

John Crowe Ransom put the defense of the system in more general terms: "Slavery was a feature monstrous enough in theory but, more often than not, humane in practice. . . ."² And Allen Tate, in presenting the defense of slavery with a historical perspective, suggested that one of its justifications was the kind of society and values it made possible:

The institution of slavery was a positive good only in the sense that Calhoun had argued that it was: it had become a necessary element in a stable society. He had argued justly that only in a society of fixed classes can men be free. Only men who are socially as well as economically secure can preserve the historical sense of obligation. This historical sense of obligation implied a certain freedom to do right. In the South, between White and Black, it took the form of benevolent protection: the White man was in every sense responsible for the Black. The Black man, "free," would have been exploited.³

The implications of this paternalism are spelled out by Tate in his second biography. As a specific example of the sense of responsibility toward slaves and of the humaneness of the system in practice, the treatment the Davis brothers (Jefferson and Joseph) accorded their slaves is described: they ran their plantation with Negro overseers; for slaves who were accused of some crime, they had a system of trial by jury (consisting of the peers of the slaves); one overseer was called James, not Jim; Negroes who could earn money were encouraged to do so, and the brothers did business with them. "No slavery system is good simply because it involves slavery; but in the hands of the Davis brothers and thousands like them it entailed more responsibility than abuse."⁴ The characteristic of "inherited responsibility" Tate attributed to the

¹ John Brown, pp. 331-32.

² "The South Defends Its Heritage," p. 112.

³ Stonewall Jackson, p. 39.

⁴ Jefferson Davis, p. 72.

fact that the ruling class is agrarian; the agrarian order which he used as evidence was the slave-based society of the Old South. With the security insured by inherited land, the need to be materialistic was reduced, and thus the continuation and development of a civilized society were possible:

Men were bound by their responsibility to a definite physical legacy--land and slaves--which more and more as Southern society tended to become stable after 1850, checked the desire for mere wealth and power. Men are everywhere the same, and it is only the social system that imposes a check upon the acquisitive instinct, accidentally and as the condition of a certain prosperity, that in the end makes for stability and creates the close ties among all classes which distinguished civilization from a mere social machine. Only the agricultural order in the past has achieved this.

It was Wade who hinted at the argument that slavery as an institution was dangerous to the master, although he did not specify in what respect this could be so: One implied explanation is that the master reduces his impulse for benevolence to an approving selfishness, and hence he degrades his dignity as a humane being. His values are distorted by the grateful subservience of his slave:

What made things worse was that to the negroes neither condescension nor complacency was objectionable. They rather liked to be patronized. All they asked was kindness. So far as they cared, the giver might make his gift with any degree of sanctimoniousness he fancied. It was in this that certain old Southerners were chiefly right when they condemned slavery in their hearts and recognized, in spite of superficials that it was more hazardous to master than to man.²

Historically, the Southern defense of slavery was an attack as well--an attack on the North's hypocrisy, on its failure to accept a share of responsibility for the establishment of slavery as an institution, on its mere impersonal "slavery" implicit in the industrial system. In one sense, it was said, Northern industrial slavery was worse than Southern

¹ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

² Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, p. 274.

chattel slavery since there were no checks against the individual manufacturer who exploited his wage slaves. The very impersonality of the industrial system resulted, Tate implied, is an imprisonment and degradation as bad as that in slavery, if not worse:

The problems of modern labor were created [in the Reconstruction period] and from the point of view of industry they are, in one respect at least, not vastly different from the problem of the slaveholder. The slave had to be housed and fed over the dull season; the modern laborer, asking for bread in a business 'depression,' gets it-- in jail.

Tate's reinterpretation of Southern feelings toward abolitionists and Northern antagonism to slavery was based on a critique of certain moral assumptions:

There were people in New England who wanted to destroy democracy and civil liberties in America by freeing the slaves. They were not very intelligent people; so they didn't know precisely what they wanted to destroy. They thought God had told them what to do. A Southern man knows better than this. He knew that God only told people to do right: He never told them what was right. These privy-to-God people were sending little pamphlets down South telling the Negroes, whom they had never seen, that they were abused.²

It was Tate, too, whose sweeping condemnation of industrialism served to defend slavery; while admitting certain injustices of the system, he nevertheless found the relationship it fostered more humane, more personal. Indeed, out of the great evil of slavery "had come a certain good"--ties of "association and affection," which in the final consideration mitigated its two injustices: the humiliation of the label "slave" and the lack of opportunity for the "talented individual . . . to rise." Apart from these two factors, the negro slave was better off, said Tate, than is the modern industrial laborer:

. . . as a class he has no more than the slave's chance to better himself. He has the feeling, which the negro lacked,

¹ "More about the Reconstruction," p. 377.

² Stonewall Jackson, p.25.

of not belonging to an institution or class--a void that he fills with cheap luxuries, cheap automobiles, cheap radios, cheap literatures; . . . and the employer feels responsible to no law but his own desire.¹

And the argument that slavery as a system was bad for the society that fostered it was in a sense countered by Tate when he observed that because the industrial worker is "the major consumer of mass production" and because "production is diluted to his wants, . . . the higher values of all society are degraded." In this context, Tate's conclusion may appear not quite so startling: "For society as a whole the modern system is probably inferior to that of slavery."

Few of the Agrarians before the publication of the symposium include the recent past in their comments on the Negroes. Their concern was with the South's historic sense of guilt. Yet, at least one writer, Stark Young, in a sense anticipating an argument frequently heard when desegregation is discussed today, asserted that if the North had just left well enough alone, slavery would have disappeared gradually. The reason, he implied, lay in the warm relationship existing between slave and master and in the character of the Negroes themselves. While conceding that the friendliness was to be found only in the landholding class, not among the poor whites who had always felt "the deadliest hatred," Young believed that the process by which thousands of slaves became freedmen--"either because of their exceptional qualities or through the privilege given them of saving up money made by extra work until they had enough to buy their freedom" or because "owners who did not believe in slavery . . . were glad to balance matters by this increase in the number of freedmen"--would have ushered in the new era gradually, and the "negro's special capacities for a free state would have been tried out." Instead--

All this rational possibility was destroyed by this deliberate and continued sowing of hate by Washington agents and pilfering carpetbaggers. Hence, to a large extent,

¹Jefferson Davis, p. 43.

the solid South, stupid in some aspects. And the race hatred, whites and blacks, so terrible in its results, comes more than sixty per cent of it, from this dastardly process outlasting a decade.¹

In Young's opinion, the finer relationship that had developed between slave and "superior whites" fortunately had not disappeared completely in the twentieth century. By a closer acquaintance with such Negroes as his housekeeper Aunt Becky Ruffin from Georgia, with her "kindly talents, common sense and tact and goodness, reliability and natural mildness," Northerners who tended to think of the race problem in abstractions might be able to speak of the South in terms other than uncompromisingly condemnatory, Young implied. Claude Bowers' book, The Tragic Era, picturing the terrible wrong done the Negroes after the Civil War and the objections raised by such friends as Northern Mr. X, would be answered, Young suggested, by the Aunt Becky Ruffins of the present:

I am hoping almost maliciously, . . . that Aunt Becky is giving Mr. Bowers' book a sharper bite for X and that she will serve as an illustration of that human pilgrim's progress toward adjustment--on both sides--that we might have had in the South but for his Republican heroes of sixty years ago.²

In considering the biography of Paul Robeson, written by his wife, Stark Young raised a similar objection. As a Negro the singer was represented as "having suffered the darkest wrongs and difficulties"--a depiction to which Young objected because it made of him "a remarkable Negro instead of what he is, a remarkable man." But more disturbing to Young was Mrs. Robeson's portrayal of Robeson in the image of the white man:

False as it might have been, it would have been truer to paint the two of them [Robeson and his father, a preacher of some education] as pure Deep South types than as these wretched figureheads made up out of propriety and intention, and based on a certain competition and argument, by which

¹"Aunt Becky and Mr. Bowers," New Republic, LXIII (June 11, 1930), 99.

²Ibid.

they are to match a similar excellence in the white race, or in white moral fiction.

Donald Davidson, in his semi-autobiographical poem, The Tall Men, depicts one modern Southerner's attitude toward the Negro in the image of a wall; the compromise reached in 1927 for dealing with the historic fact of separation of the races was acceptance:

Black man, when you and I were young together,
We knew each other's hearts. Though I am no longer
A child, and you perhaps unfortunately
Are no longer a child, we still understand
Better maybe than others. There is a wall
Between us, anciently erected. Once
It might have been crossed, men say. But now I cannot
Forget that I was master, and you can hardly
Forget that you were slave. We did not build
The ancient wall, but there it painfully is.
Let us not bruise our foreheads on the wall.²

Before the symposium the most thoroughgoing treatment of the Negro came, however, not from the poets, biographers, art critics, or historians of the group, but from a psychologist, Lyle Lanier.³ In 1929 the report of his extensive testings of Negroes and whites (begun as part of his doctoral study) was published as Studies in the Comparative Abilities of Whites and Negroes, with senior author Joseph Peterson. The measurements, in essence, seemed designed to test the scientific validity of certain assumptions made in the traditional view of the Negro: that the inferiority of the Negro is the result of innate racial differences as well as of cultural and environmental influences. Twelve-year old Negro and white children were tested in Nashville, New York, and Chicago, and college students in two teacher-training institutions of

¹"Paul Robeson, Negro," New Republic, LXIII (August 6, 1930), 345.

²"Geography of the Brain," pp. 39-40.

³Dr. Lanier's research on race differences had, he said, "little or nothing to do with the 'race problem' in the South. At least not directly." (Letter to Virginia Rock, December 8, 1959.)

Tennessee were given a variety of tests measuring mental ability, ingenuity, mechanical aptitude, musical talent (the Seashore tests), and personal traits--speed, aggressiveness, carefulness and persistence. Anthropological methods were used to measure physical features--width of nostrils, lip thickness, head length and width, lightness of skin, etc. In general, the results corroborated the impression that whites were superior to Negroes in intelligence, but the correlations between the results and the "degree of white characteristics" were inconclusive.

In the context of this study of agrarianism what is of particular interest about Lanier's monograph are not the results so much as some of the assumptions being tested, the accompanying explanatory comments, and inferences that may be drawn from them. Lanier took note of the explanation that facilities for the education of Negroes are not equal to those for white children--the schools were more crowded and had poorer teachers; the testing showed that the Negroes were one and a half grades behind the whites in Nashville, despite the fact that the school term was the same for both groups. "This general retardation among Negro children in the South is simply a fact," wrote Lanier and Peterson, "one, however, that does not without further research warrant the conclusion that it is wholly due to poorer opportunities. To what extent these poorer opportunities are due to environmental factors on the one hand, and to innate limitations, on the other--this is the great problem at issue."¹ The retardation of New York Negroes was considerably less, only one-half a school year. "This difference is probably too small," suggested the authors, "since the city distribution includes the negroes." They then ask, "Is this failure of the negro to progress in school as fast as the white due to a lack of ability, or to the operation of conditions which are unfavorable to the negro?"² New

¹ Lyle Lanier with Joseph Peterson, Studies in the Comparative Abilities of Whites and Negroes, Mental Measurement Monographs, Serial No. 5, February, 1929, p. 9.

² Ibid., p. 15.

York Negroes who had spent some time in schools in the South or in the West Indies were behind the native New York Negro. At this point Lanier noted that "there are certain advantages of instruction and motivation in the educational system of New York which are superior to what the negro gets in the South and in the West Indies."¹ One possible explanation for this indication that environmental and cultural differences may account for the inference is that the measurable mental inferiority of the Negroes may not be innate and that the Nashville educational system is inferior to New York's. However, "overcrowded schools [in New York] may result in pushing children on so that Nashville children are retarded as judged by the New York standard."² Also offered was another cultural-biological explanation for the higher rating of New York Negroes:

In New York the negroes have actually surpassed the whites in one test (Rational Learning) and have practically equalled them in [two others]. None of these differences is reliable. There is apparently developing in New York, under the more severe struggle for existence a highly selected negro population which represents the best genes in the race--whether pure or mixed with white and Indian blood. In this select group, and in college groups generally, there seems to be no correlation between intelligence scores and degree of white characteristics . . . and there is no good reason why there should be. The result of this sort of selectiveness of the best genes in the negroes doubtless impoverishes considerably the negro stock in the South and in the West Indies, to the enrichment of that in New York and other similar centers. In such centers it is seemingly producing results which may in time yield a negro of high intelligence, even surpassing, it may be, the general level of the whites, who are less handicapped by social discrimination. These results, both in the South and in New York, may become loaded with serious import to the negroes themselves as well as to the whites.³

The final conclusion reached as a result of the testing and measurements was to leave open the question of racial differences in innate intelligence:

¹Ibid., p. 17.

²Ibid.,

³Ibid., p. 99.

In view of various sorts of evidence of effects of "cultural sets" on efficiency in different tests, effects which vary considerably from test to test, it is well to consider the question as to the degree of innateness of the racial differences here found an open one, though evidence points to a difference in native intellectual ability favoring the whites. It should be said that the negro college students are probably more highly selected samples as to intellectual ability than are white college students, since a larger per cent of the latter attend college. . . . However, this difference in selectiveness in the two race groups is offset to an unknown degree by the inferior training and the general educational opportunities of the negroes, an inferiority which exists for them from the first grade to the university. What the net effects of these differences in sampling (favoring the negroes in comparison of college students) and in school training (favoring the whites) really are on the test scores, we cannot say without further investigation. It is best not to speculate on them here.¹

From this testing of urban subjects, it is impossible to draw any conclusions about the rural Negro's mental abilities, nor was this Lanier's concern since his study was directed toward "innate" mental ability. The report, however, appears to make use of an assumption commonly held in the South of an innate mental superiority of the white; and the evidence for the tests conducted was not conclusive enough to lead to the abandonment of this assumption. Nor were the implications of the higher achievement of New York Negroes, as compared to Nashville's, pursued (quite properly not--to have done so would have demanded an abandonment of psychology for sociology). But like several of the other Agrarians, Lanier objected to considering the race question in abstract terms: "There is a tendency," he wrote to Tate in 1930, "to ignore possible psychological differences between the races and to consider the negro and the white abstractly as two individuals with an incidental color difference. The matter is not as simple as this."²

¹ Ibid., p. 152.

² Letter, August 1, 1930.

Political Theory

Any system of economics or theory of society involves a treatment of man as a political animal. Being individualists, the future Agrarians held views that did not always appear to agree, either within their own system or with the theories expressed by others in the group. However, this apparent contradiction is resolved in the realization that they were presenting their political views in two contexts--economic and aesthetic--and were using political terminology for both.

In general, their political character, as revealed before the symposium, might be described as anti-progressive, or "conservative"--that is, in seeking to conserve or perpetuate a land-based society, characterized economically by the widespread ownership of small farms, they were turning back to a social and economic order that had existed in the past and might, they believed, still be re-established but within the larger political framework. In the economic context, as we have seen, they attacked capitalism and Northern industrialism, "progress," and rapid change, which they found most prevalent in urban centers. Thus, negatively, they described their character in political terminology as a bias against plutocracy, as well as against a degenerated democracy. In the positive, or aesthetic context, some of the Agrarians wrote of preferring an aristocratic or hierarchical system. Hence, the advocacy of a social order permitting a rich culture to flourish (the aesthetic level) was not logically at variance with the assertion that they were Jeffersonian democrats (the economic context). Both concepts were centered on land-ownership, and both permitted the development of the individual. Indeed, this "profoundly individualistic" aspect of the agrarian program appeared to be one of its most important features.¹ On the other hand, an easy-going, uncritical

¹In the opinion of Henry Blue Kline individualistic best signified the agrarian movement: "In sum and substance it expounds time and time again, from various points of attack, the belief that men (or at least strong men--homo volens) are worth infinitely more than any machine, any system, any institution; that Social Humanity without Individual Humanity isn't worth a tinker's damn." (Letter to Donald Davidson, March 13, 1930.)

"liberalism" was looked upon with suspicion. As a reviewer for The Nation, Tate, with heavy irony, questioned the "liberalism" of Columbia University President Nicholas Murray Butler, who had complained about the heavy income tax as a menace to higher education:

It is pleasant and soothing . . . to listen to Nicholas Murray Butler pleading for more liberty and liberalism in the United States. Time was when those liquid tones were still. When the country was being hounded into war, when minds were being conscripted as brutally as bodies, when Mitchell Palmer was misusing the power of office to arrest innocent men by the thousands--in those hectic days the calm voice of reason which is Mr. Butler's was silent. The cause of liberty had to fight its way without him. But times have changed. The grand old right to drink is at stake, and the child-labor amendment threatens to destroy sacred rights of the factory owners; and the heroic voice of Nicholas Murray Butler is heard again in the land.¹

Tate was suspicious of a "liberalism" which supported the dissipation of the wealthy industrialists pleading for an irresponsible freedom which, "to Mr. Butler, seems to mean principally freedom from taxation," while "liberty means liberty to spend one's money in whiskey, parakeets, and university endowments, . . . [This is] the impression one gains by studying the occasions on which he sets out crusading."²

Underlying the political conservatism of the group is the assumption that an agrarian society is a religious one in which man recognizes his inadequacy before a God with thunder. A religious people, Ransom has suggested, are of necessity politically conservative--they look to the past, defend the status quo, and reject progressive doctrines. Although religion is not fundamental to all political economies, Ransom acknowledged, it is responsible for a certain kind:

There are in the main just two economies: The one is religious, and the other secular. The former is the

¹"Mr. Butler, Liberal," The Nation, CXX (January 14, 1925), 31 (editorial).

²Ibid., p. 32.

conservative, the latter is the progressive. In history it is always the conservative policy which the religionists favor. Philology represents religion as looking backward rather than forward: re back, plus ligo, bind. Religion enlarges the God and limits the man, telling the believer incessantly to remember his limits, and be content with his existing condition.

. . . the religionists defended the status quo: they did not quite propose to undo history and revert to primitivism; they only questioned any fresh and sweeping developments. They objected to any fanatical doctrine of progress.¹

The heritage of the South, Ransom believed, permitted such a conservatism to continue: it was a conservatism, however "antique," however depressed, that should be used to resist the infiltration of "progressivism." Ransom expressed the hope that the historian and philosopher who think more deeply might find that the Southern idea has more than the American to recommend it. The enticement "by the blandishments of those fine words, Progressive, Liberal, and Forward," he observed, is an explanation for the "deracination in our Western life." The issue, as Ransom saw it, was phrased as a rhetorical question:

Will the Southern establishment, the most substantial exhibit on this continent of a society of the European and historic order, be completely crumbled by the powerful acid of the Great Progressive Principle? Will there be no more looking backward but only looking forward? Is our New World to be dedicated forever to the doctrine of newness?²

Thus, while a forward look perhaps cannot be avoided, a greater emphasis on the past could bring to a changing society the stability for cultural development. A traditional Southern agrarianism would prevent excessively rapid progress and thus would permit the flourishing of a rich aesthetic life.

John Gould Fletcher attacked democracy as a form of government just at this point--where society becomes unstable, where a state of equilibrium is not insured. He indicated in

¹ God Without Thunder, pp. 116, 122.

² "The South Defends Its Heritage," pp. 108, 110, 115.

1927 that democracy as it exists in America meant government by mobs, a government which permitted the hounding of men like Sacco and Vanzetti to the electric chair while it complacently accepted the worst corruptions of oligarchic government. Fletcher equated democracy to plutocracy, a government "carried on by tradespeople in the interest of the merchant class. Such governments," he wrote, "have no programme; they pay as little attention to the dominant sentiments of the people governed as they do to the traditions of the past. They exist in order to bargain, to vulgarise, to compete, to offer the bait of glittering promises to the vast and over-crowded swarms of industrial world-centers."¹ It is this materialistic aspect that Fletcher finds characteristic of American government:

America, since 1860, has never known any other kind of government than this shameless thing which calls itself democracy, but which works always in the interest of plutocracy, and which has neither the honour, nor the integrity,² nor the religious sense of destiny, to create a culture.²

"Democracy" is explicitly identified with a capitalist ruling class, i.e., a plutocracy; Rousseau's successors, he wrote, were unable to substitute anything for a destroyed French monarchy but "the vulgar, time-serving dishonestly bargaining commercial democracy under which the whole of the Occident is at present fallen, and which rules solely by means of greed and grab, bread and circuses, glittering promises to the working-class which are immediately broken or withdrawn."³ This negative reaction to democracy (which destroyed culture) helps to explain his approval of aristocracy. When he wrote of his preference for a social hierarchy, he apparently had in mind an intellectual or artistic elite. In 1918, a decade before the symposium was published, Fletcher wrote from England that artists are an aristocracy, that they must be the

¹ Introduction to Les Réveries du promeneur solitaire by Jean Jacques Rousseau (New York, 1927), p. 22.

² Ibid., p. 23.

³ Ibid., p. 26.

only aristocracy, and as such their attitude towards democracy must not be the attitude of a worshipper of the mob.

Nearly a decade later, still considering himself an aristocrat, though a radical not a reactionary one, Fletcher reasserted his affinity with aristocracy which, he felt, had at least produced decent living conditions in the past, had shaped gentlemen like Lee and Lincoln, and had "given us all our best standards of life and conduct." The paeans to the future promised by democracy to him seemed sentimental and not worth the winning if the best of the past had to be destroyed in the process. To Tate, in 1929, Fletcher wrote that one way to resist the effect of individual capitalism was to create an intelligent working class--individuals determined to maintain their integrity. This apparent contradiction to his bias for aristocracy disappears when he made explicit the nature of the choice presented to modern man: between socialism or plutocracy, Fletcher would choose socialism which, he felt, would eliminate economically based class distinctions and at least would not stultify a man's aesthetic potential. Frankly admitting that he would have preferred to live in the eighteenth century and realizing that he had no such choice, Fletcher suggested that the only question worth considering is what can be done: the answer, he felt, was to stabilize the industrial system by creating a self-responsible laboring class ready to use democratic means to counterpoise capitalism. The horror of a modern industrial plutocracy, he believed, was its massing of individuals, its failure to separate men according to function, its lack of balance; in such a state, he concluded, everyone is regarded as equally capable and hence equally damned.

This objection to a society in which all men were to be tools, differentiated only by their economic power and used merely for the efficient operation of an industrial order also had been expressed by Davidson in his review of Dorothy Thompson's book, The New Russia. Davidson saw Russia as a symbol of the consequences of an industrial ruling order, and implied that it was prophetic of what America could become if

such a process was allowed to continue uncontrolled. Russia, he wrote, "represents an advance type of new city-state, founded on industrialism and operating under a rigidly methodized scientific psychology. Considered as such, Russia, even with all its present compromises with a more conservative order, is a forecast of what may happen if the city finally conquers the country."¹ The creed, "Collectivism," unifies the state and people to a point where it threatens the complete extinction of the importance of the individual. He ceases to be valuable except as a "functioning unit." As part of "the working, producing units," he belongs to the Proletariat. Such a collective system prevails in Soviet Russia, "conceived and organized on the analogy of the factory, . . . the perfect exemplar of the machine state and of the machine age. . . . its catchwords . . . scientific and industrial." By implication, Davidson would seem to suggest that the political structure of Russia foreshadows a danger implicit in the direction industrial America is moving:

Russians admire us for our mechanical triumphs, our extraordinary standardization program, our grasp of material problems. . . .

. . . For me--the picture of the "New Russia" . . . becomes more and more terrifying as its outlines swerve and merge and harden into an altogether rigid and non-human image, the image of the State-as-Factory. . . .²

Just as there was a fear that the industrial process would suppress individualism, so there was a concern about the ability of individual states to maintain their distinctiveness. The historic States Rights doctrine was reaffirmed. Tate based this conservative political doctrine on an argument for a strict interpretation of the Constitution. In the context of justifying the South's secession, he objected again to the North's treatment of the issue as something abstract: "The Northern revolutionists chose to interpret the

¹"The Critic's Almanac," Nashville Tennessean, October 28, 1928.

²Ibid.

Constitution through some mystical sense that had no exact correspondence with the letter of that document. . . . They interpreted it by abstract right. The South interpreted it historically, literally."¹ The South, not the North, implied Tate, was true to the letter of the document; thus, "secession was not revolution; it was Constitutionalism." To assert that the South sought to break away from the government implied an inadequate idea of the "government"; it was not "a political machinery, that had for some obscure reason to be preserved." For the South, "the only government was the Constitution," and "the North was about to tear it asunder."² The emphasis on the preservative, or conservative character of the Constitution, suggested Tate, was related to the democratic right of individuals to fight for personal freedom, which they identified with the rights of the states. During the Civil War, for instance, disciplining raw troops was difficult because "they were free men; they had been brought up to believe in personal liberty." Basically, whether they came from large plantations or small farms, they were all fighting for the same thing--not slavery but "for their country, for the principle of local self government that for generations had given them their independence." In short, concluded Tate, "they were fighting for State Rights."³

Davidson, too, found the principle a valid one, worthy of recognition as a means of warring against industrialism and its effects:

The doctrine of States Rights has long been politically submerged, and shows little prospect of being raised to life. Spiritually, it is more important than ever; for while we live under the blessings of national unity, we must take care that unity does not become uniformity. In the day of standardization we have the moral obligation to discover the uses of variety, which is an aid to the good life. . . . There is more than political truth in the

¹ Stonewall Jackson, p. 60.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 68.

Wilsonian word, self-determination; it is a fair mixture of differences that makes a tolerable harmony.¹

In looking back on the period of agrarian ferment, Warren felt that members of the group were doubtful, not of democracy but of its perversion; they objected to a society where all men were levelled into uniformity; they recognized the danger of irresponsibility, of a lack of leadership, of the power possessed by a hidden materialistic elite to control thought through mass communications. Perhaps, said Warren, this was a romantic view, but "it's what we felt."² What Warren had feared, as he reconstructed his thinking of the symposium period, was the "machine of power in this so-called democratic state; the machines disintegrate individuals, so you have no individual sense of responsibility and no awareness that the individual has a past and a place. He's simply the voting machine; he's everything you pull the lever on, if there's any voting at all." For Warren all of this was connected with "personal sentiments and sentimentalities . . . personal pieties, . . . images of place and people" that belonged to an earlier life, "the Confederate element"--all becoming "images for these individual values." The situation, he said, was for him "a protest-- . . . against certain things: against a kind of de-humanizing and disintegrative effect on your notion of what an individual person could be in the sense of a loss of your role in society. You would take it a loss that you had no place in that world."³ Warren's observation that he thought they were trying to find a rational basis for democracy was supported by both Owsley and Tate. The use of the word "aristocratic," Warren felt, described them only if taken in the Jeffersonian sense: "That was my notion--that aspect of it at that time. We were trying to find a notion of democracy which would make it possible for people to be

¹ "First Fruits of Dayton," p. 906.

² Interview, September 4, 1957.

³ Fugitives' Reunion, pp. 209-10.

people and not to be bosses or exploiters, or anything else of other people, but to have a community of people."¹

"Practical" suggestions for political action--that is, methods or techniques which would be an effective resistance to industrialization--were neither numerous nor very specific before the publication of the symposium. This is not surprising considering the fact that most of the group were poets, critics, and teachers--and that the most obvious form of action for them was writing, or propagandizing--which they were doing devotedly and enthusiastically; they were not organizers of political action groups nor did they attempt to suggest legislation to state officials. Only John Crowe Ransom entered the political arena with practical suggestions--and they were necessarily tentative and general. They involved the cooperation of three groups: people sympathetic with the agrarian point of view (i.e., Western farmers, educators, artists, "religionists," and residents of New England townships who would share an appreciation of cultural values rather than seek materialistic success); Southern politicians, and the Democratic Party. With the somewhat "uninformed Western agrarian party" Ransom felt the Southern agrarians might join forces since both represent "a community of interest; both desire to defend home, stability of life, the practice of leisure, . . . the natural enemy of both is the insidious industrial system."² If these two groups could also enlist the support of others who hold similar views (although they are "geographically diverse elements of public opinion"), the result would be the formation of both a formidable bloc and a "clean-cut policy that the rural life of America must be defended and the world made safe for farmers."³ Ransom seemed less certain about the efficacy of his second and third proposals: they were more specific. He recognized the

¹ Ibid., p. 214.

² "The South Defends Its Heritage," p. 117.

³ Ibid.

necessity of working through Southern politicians and indicated that they needed to be encouraged "to do something more than scramble vigorously for a Southern share in the federal spoils," and to recognize that the South has an important part to play in the "counter-revolution." His conclusion to his programmatic suggestions was couched in very provisional terms:

But I get quickly beyond my depth in sounding political possibilities. And perhaps I may as well expose my limitations conclusively by uttering one last fantastic point. No Southerner ever dreams of Heaven, or pictures his utopia on earth, without providing room for the Democratic party. Is it possible that the Democratic party can really be held to a principle, and that the principle can now be defined as agrarian, conservative, profoundly social? It may not be possible after all. If it proves possible, then the South may yet be rewarded for the sentimental affection that has persisted in the face of many betrayals.¹

* * *

Clearly, this survey of the personal backgrounds, education, and regional heritage reveals that these twelve Southerners several years before the planning of the symposium were shaping into a group, in spite of the fact that many of them were separated geographically and were engaged in quite different activities. In more impersonal terms, a recent sociological definition of a group describes with surprising accuracy the developing character of the twelve Agrarians:

A group is not an aggregate of individuals or a statistical count of their characteristics. . . . Group properties differ from those seen in separate persons--group purposes, structure, action, morale, leadership and the like. . . . one must think about the group as a new entity, a social system integrating members about a core of common values. . . . It is a structured relationship, a togetherness, the nature of which differs from the sum of its individual member-unit parts.²

To this definition was appended a description of the functions

¹ Ibid., p. 118.

² Lloyd A. Cook and Elaine F. Cook, A Sociological Approach to Education (New York, 1950), p. 309.

of a group; they would seem also to represent to a significant degree values the agrarians would realize in their group activity:

First, groups are the "grounds" on which one stands, his major avenue of contact with people, their culture, problems, and strivings. . . . Second, groups give security to the individual, a sanction to his ideas and ideals, a feeling of their worth and rightness. Third, it is through groups that one realizes his basic purposes, reaching his peak of self-development and expression. Finally . . . groups are centers of emotional satisfaction. . . .¹

William Yandell Elliott's comment about the group character of the Fugitives at their reunion would also be applicable to the later Agrarians: "This was not a 'made' group by the usual technique of imitation or even osmosis from some other schools. . . . it had roots of its own. And the combination of these roots . . . in a Southern kind of community or setting . . . plus this classic background in Southern education . . . is more important than the content."²

¹ Ibid., p. 310.

² Fugitives' Reunion, pp. 104-105.

CHAPTER IV

THE MILIEU

The Immediate Environment: Vanderbilt, Nashville and Tennessee

No book, however original, can completely escape influence from the environments of its author. Certainly a work concerned with economic, political, historical, and cultural factors would reflect not only the personal experiences and attitudes of its creators but also either positively or negatively the character of its place and time. I'll Take My Stand undeniably is a product of the academic, local, state, sectional and national milieu. It is a book by writers educated to a respect for the humanities, Southerners who knew Vanderbilt and Tennessee, who were aware of and devoted to regional values, Americans living in an era of big-business prosperity in the process of disintegration at the time they were planning their attack.

All of the contributors to the symposium shared a respect for the aesthetic, for belles lettres; all but two of them had been imbued with this humanism at Vanderbilt. Before 1930 the education offered was more classical and conservative than practical, although certain "liberalizing" forces were at work. Connections with the Southern Methodist church (which had controlled the Board of Trust from the early 1890's) were severed permanently by the State Supreme Court in 1914; Greek was dropped as a requirement for the Bachelor of Arts in 1918; and Chancellor Kirkland on the occasion of the University's Semi-Centennial in 1925 lauded its "progress"--the establishment of a good medical school, the success of its "Four Million Dollar Campaign" to acquire funds for a doctoral program in

strong departments of the College of Arts and Sciences¹: "The College of Arts and Sciences," he declared, "must remain the heart of the whole institution, and send its quickening life blood into every fiber and tissue."²

Yet the Fugitive-Agrarians did not welcome all of these developments with enthusiasm. As men of letters who valued their own training in the classical languages, they lamented the loss of Greek as a requirement for a Bachelor of Arts degree. Andrew Lytle, commenting on his education in relation to his development as a novelist, pointed out that although he had taken only one year of Greek, he came to realize that the classical languages "are so hard that they make you look at the word in all its relationships."³ Allen Tate agreed with Dr. Sanborn, professor of philosophy at Vanderbilt, that "the foundations of the University had been shaken" with the elimination of Greek as a requirement.⁴ And T. S. Eliot's comment to Tate about Southern education--"You may not have had a very large curriculum in the Southern colleges, but it was sound. . . . At Harvard, where the curriculum had been ruined by my eminent cousin, Charles W. Eliot, I never got any education until I graduated . . . because it was sort of like a cafeteria: you just took one little thing after another"--led Tate to observe: "I think he probably exaggerated the thoroughness of Southern education, but its very conservatism accounts for some of the things that happened to this [Fugitive] group."⁵

¹In 1928 the departments of chemistry, history, and English were authorized to grant doctoral degrees. Owsley, Ransom, and Wade, among others, were instrumental in developing the program: "The Ph. D. program . . . was being created when I went there, and my impression is that my being asked to come was based on the idea of my 'heading-up' the section dealing with American Literature." (John Donald Wade, letter to Virginia Rock, August 5, 1958.)

²Quoted in Edwin Mims, History of Vanderbilt University (Nashville, 1946), p. 396.

³Fugitives' Reunion, p. 104.

⁴Ibid., p. 116.

⁵Ibid., p. 105.

By way of corroboration Davidson pointed out that "the present philosophy classes at Vanderbilt will never read anything Greek. There's nobody in the class that would be proficient enough to read the Greek. And so there's an enormous difference between the present generation and our generation."¹

For Lytle this "enormous difference" was represented in the disappearance of the kind of education Ransom had experienced--an education "in the best tradition of humane learning . . . derived from a coherent view of life":

It was the last possible moment to get so completely this kind of education, for this was a historic moment everywhere in the Western world, the latter part of the Nineteenth and the first part of the Twentieth Centuries. It was the last moment of equilibrium, of peace and the enjoyment of the peaceful arts. It was the last time a man could know who he was. Or where he was from. It was the last time a man, without having to think, could say what was right and what was wrong. For almost overnight, with the automobile for symbol of the change, the community disappeared.²

There were other intangibles in their Vanderbilt educational experiences which drew them together: the distinctiveness and superior quality of certain professors, the tradition of literary clubs and conversational discussions which had persisted at Vanderbilt and in Nashville since the 1880's, and the respect and tolerance with which such groups were treated. Vanderbilt, which in the 1920's was a "small and close provincial college," made possible an experience that they felt would not have been duplicated in a large university--a marked and distinctive influence which faculty members of great stature had on perceptive students. Warren noted, in his assessment of Vanderbilt education, "the limitations made a kind of personal focus on individuals and on ideas; I remember this quite distinctly, since some of these

¹ Ibid., p. 110.

² Andrew Lytle, "Note on a Traditional Sensibility," Homage to John Crowe Ransom, The Sewanee Review, LVI (Summer, 1948), 371-72.

people represented the great world of ideas and the great world of geography, of wider horizons, in a very special way which is no longer true in educational institutions. . . ."¹ Among the men at Vanderbilt during the early 1920's who had made such an impact were Ransom himself, Dr. Herbert C. Tolman, Professor of Greek and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Dr. Herbert C. Sanborn, Professor of Philosophy.² Described as one of the nation's ablest scholars in Greek and

¹Fugitives Reunion, p. 117.

²Representative of the admiration Ransom's Fugitive students had for him were comments by Elliott: "No one who went through Beowulf with Johnny, or listened to him expound Hamlet or read some of Shakespeare with that restraint that was so unusual . . . could fail to say that his characteristically modest statement was an understatement completely. I mean, he had a very right critical sense marked by that kind of detachment and somewhat courtly wit, that was a refreshing and rare thing in the sentimentality with which we were bathed at that time. . . . When I spoke of Johnny's courtly manner, . . . I was perhaps giving a little of the hint of the complete fairness and the very, very moving quality of understanding that he brought, which you may call gentillesse if you like. . . ." Tate added: "He had no animus about him; he was detached, and that's how we learned from him." (Fugitives' Reunion, pp. 88-90.)

Of Tolman, Tate observed: "[He] was one of the greatest scholars in this country and one of the greatest human beings I have ever known," and Alec Stevenson, one of the original Fugitives, added, "a man of great charm [whose] interest in all languages was not only that of a research man, an analyst, but also that . . . really of a poet." Both Tate and Ransom contributed verse to a memorial volume for Dr. Tolman, published in 1926, three years after his death (In Memoriam, Nashville, 1926, pp. 73 ff.).

The character of Sanborn's impact was somewhat different: "In spite of the tremendous learning . . . he was so dogmatic that he really provoked all the independent minds into doing some thinking of their own," Elliott declared. Davidson's description captures Sanborn's personality both as a teacher and as a scholar: "One could but be awed and obedient when Dr. Sanborn strode vigorously to his desk, cloaked in all the Olympian majesty of Leipzig and Heidelberg, and, without a book or note before him, delivered a perfectly ordered lecture, freely sprinkled with quotations from the original Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, German, French, or Italian, which of course he would not insult us by translating." (Southern Writers in the Modern World, pp. 11-12.)

Sanskrit, Tolman succeeded in creating in his students "an understanding of the nobility and grandeur of Greek literature" through which he had "a profound effect on the young men who became Fugitives." Dr. Sanborn, a brilliant scholar and linguist, was "a vigorous foe of scientific materialism," a philosopher of such firm convictions that his students respected him even when they might not have agreed.¹ "We had them right through from the beginning," said Tate. "We weren't shopping around." Further, the opportunity for personal relations which they enjoyed to an unusual degree, was, for them, highly important. That their informal, friendly exchange with their professors and among themselves is related to their group activity as Fugitives and later as Agrarians is implied in Davidson's comment:

. . . this [easy personal access] was continued with talking among ourselves constantly. From 1914 to somewhere in the early 1930's, when I look back on it, it seems to me the period of the best conversation and intimate intercourse that I've ever enjoyed in my life; and since then there's been nothing to equal it, because the college community that we had then has just disappeared; it's broken up.²

The disintegration of this close, intellectual community was already beginning in the later twenties: the University was expanding, some of the "legendary" teachers had died and others were so old that students who enrolled in the courses after the Fugitive generation had no experience with their remarkable minds. For Cleanth Brooks³ and even for Warren, "the whole spectrum was greatly changed." "It may well be," said Brooks at the Reunion, "that there was a very lively and fine configuration just at that time, and within five or six years the thing had changed."⁴ By the time the

¹ Cowan, The Fugitive Group, pp. 7, 15.

² Fugitives' Reunion, p. 118.

³ Brooks entered Vanderbilt in 1924 (a year before Warren received his B. A.).

⁴ Fugitives' Reunion, p. 114.

symposium was published, the spirit and character of Vanderbilt were becoming strikingly different, another indication--one might infer from Mrs. Cowan's description--that the philosophy of industrialism (with clearly unfortunate effects on education) was threatening to become a way of life in the South as well as in the North:

With the beginning of the third decade of the twentieth century, the old order at Vanderbilt was visibly disintegrating. The idea of progress had become the controlling power there, as it had become dominant, even earlier in most other universities in the nation. When Ransom and Davidson were students, Vanderbilt had clear-cut educational aims, based on the imperturbable structure of all past knowledge and transmitted to its students as an all-penetrating, basically aristocratic attitude. The new order in education shifted this basis from the source to the recipients of knowledge, with the consequent democratization of attitude, so that the aims of education were made subject to timeliness and opportunism, and standards began their long downward plunge to mediocrity.¹

Also carried over from their Fugitive days was an almost instinctive rejection of a position represented by their department chairman, Dr. Edwin Mims.² When they were primarily concerned as Fugitives with the state of poetry both nationally and in the South, they found his moralistic, over-romantic taste in poetry quite alien to a developing aesthetic formalism.³ When they began their polemical discussion of

¹"The Fugitive: A Critical History," p. 69.

²Head of the English Department at Vanderbilt for thirty years, Dr. Mims had brought Ransom to Vanderbilt in 1914.

³At the Fugitive Reunion, members of the group recalled as values in their study under Dr. Mims that he customarily had his students write their spiritual autobiography, and in his Nineteenth-Century literature course (both the Romantics and Victorians were included) he required a wide reading in the poetry, read a good deal of poetry aloud, and assigned poems and passages (the last forty lines of Tennyson's Ulysses, for example) to be memorized. Davidson, who was less militant in his reaction to romantic and Victorian poetry than Tate or Ransom, suggested both positive and negative effects of Mims' classes: "He drove us into it [a study of literature], literally, shouted at us until we took hold, somehow. And even if you responded negatively, if you didn't like the kind of

the economic, social and cultural state of affairs in the South, they found in his "New South" progressivism, expressed in various critical articles and in such volumes as The Advancing South and Adventurous America, certain views I'll Take My Stand was to attack. His encomiums to the "liberals" of the South sounded like those coming from Northern journalists:

Nothing more important and significant is happening in this country or in the world to-day than the rise to power and influence of groups of liberal leaders in the South, who are fighting against the conservatism and sensitiveness to criticism, and the lack of freedom that have too long impeded Southern progress. . . . The reactionary forces, stung to renewed action by evidences of the growth of the progressive spirit, are more outspoken, more belligerent, more apparently victorious, but their citadels are gradually being undermined by the rising tide of liberalism. The South once so potent in the life of the nation is passing through not only a remarkable industrial development, but an even more significant intellectual renaissance.¹

Southern character, he held with Walter Hines Page, too often lacked intellectual curiosity; industry and education, given time, would bring about a new world order. There was much seriously wrong with the South, he admitted, but,

None of the causes that are generally given for the condition here outlined--the Negro, poverty of the South, the heavy illiteracy, the sparsely settled areas, the interest in conversation rather than in reading--should any longer be sustained. Let us face the facts and move forward!²

The facts he wanted Southerners to face were quite different from those the Agrarians were to utilize in their defense.

teaching he did, there was something there you had to do. You were just carried on irresistibly." (Fugitives' Reunion, pp. 110-11.) Tate's reaction to Dr. Mims' literary criticism was more obviously negative; he charged that Dr. Mims suffered with cultural astigmatism and had succumbed to the sentimental, local-color fallacy--"the ingenuous opinion that a particular setting is intrinsically more 'poetic' than another." ("Last Days of a Charming Lady," p. 486.)

¹ "Intellectual Progress in the South," Review of Reviews, LXXIII (April, 1926), 367.

² The Advancing South, p. 135.

The tradition of discussing the arts in literary clubs was not without importance. From such informal conversations came The Fugitive, for instance. Nor was this experience confined to students and faculty. The unique relationship between college and community in such clubs was indicated by Jesse Wills, reminiscing about the formation of the Fugitive group:

Nashville did have some tradition of talk. There have been three literary clubs here that were founded in the 1880's¹. . . they brought businessmen and lawyers and people on the campus together to talk; and while Nashville wasn't Bohemian, or particularly worldly-wise, it was a city where everybody knew everybody else at that time--or at least if they didn't know them, knew who they were--and it was reasonably tolerant. And it was a good atmosphere for a thing like this [the Fugitive group] to develop and to keep going. . . we were treated with a certain measure of respect and consideration and tolerance as we went along.²

Henry Wells, biographer of the psychiatrist and Fugitive Merrill Moore, suggested that the success of the Fugitive meetings, which flourished in an atmosphere of free and informed discussion, was related to certain "Southern" qualities: "This gregarious, friendly character of Southern society and its traditions of cordial association for intellectual purposes lay behind the success of the Fugitive gatherings."³ The same spirit of examining and debating ideas in friendly, informal gatherings persisted with the coalescing of the Agrarians.

Although it may be argued that books or particular authors had neither a wide nor pervasive effect in the formation of the agrarian movement, some did give impetus to the direction of their ideas or reinforced views already being entertained. For the Fugitive-Agrarian Civil War biographies,

¹As a student Ransom belonged to one of these, the Calumet Club, which introduced many of the Fugitive poets to contemporary literature.

²The Fugitives' Reunion, p. 92.

³Poet and Psychiatrist, p. 38.

they read widely in their section's history. Tate has, for example, acknowledged the value of such works as Dodd's The Cotton Kingdom, U. B. Phillips' Life and Labor in the Old South, Owsley's State Rights in the Confederacy. Lytle had steeped himself in John Taylor, Jefferson, Calhoun, and Robert Barnwell Rhett about the time I'll Take My Stand was under discussion.¹ Davidson, too, was reading Southern history and finding much to support the position the Agrarians were to take. In recalling the development of the symposium, he pointed out the kind of critical writing they welcomed:

All of us . . . were turning with considerable relief from shallow social criticism . . . of the nineteen-twenties to the works of the new historians and biographers. . . . In their perfectly objective restatement of Southern history and American history we found new cause for our growing distrust of the scorn that was being volleyed at the "backward" South. What the historians said was in all really important points at variance with the assumptions of social critics and "social workers" whose procedure was based on big-city attitudes.²

Perhaps the one book of a historical nature most enthusiastically received by the Fugitive-Agrarians, as comments in letters suggested, was Christopher Hollis' The American Heresy (first published in England in 1927). Receiving the book as a gift from Fletcher in England, Tate was so impressed with the English Catholic's grasp of the history of the South, despite its obvious inaccuracies, that he recommended it to Davidson as the ablest defense the South had had since Dew, Harper, and Calhoun and offered to send his copy along. Hollis' breezily witty and biased account of American history, focused on four political leaders--Jefferson, Calhoun, Lincoln, and Wilson--offered a persuasive, unified interpretation. With its argument that the defeat of the South and the consequent fall of Jefferson's agrarian economy (safeguarded by states rights) was a great disaster to the world, Hollis'

¹ Interview with Virginia Rock, May 5, 1956.

² "I'll Take My Stand: A History," p. 308.

work was assured of a warm welcome from these Southern artists who had turned into militant historians.¹ Tate in his review for the New York Evening Post praised the author's style and unity: "Mr. Hollis writes lucidly and accurately, and at times brilliantly. The material as a whole is beautifully ordered, in the most provocative book of its kind that has appeared in this country in many a year."² Earlier he acknowledged its influence on and value to his own historical analysis in Jefferson Davis: "In so far as the general point of view of this volume is not the author's--in so far as it is indebted to influences too minute or too remote to be acknowledged--it is that of a book called The American Heresy. . . . The book is incomplete and inaccurately documented, but it is the first effort to comprehend the supposedly mixed forces of American history under a single idea."³ Some of the arguments in Hollis'

¹An excerpt from Hollis' book suggests in part the basis for Agrarian enthusiasm: "The old Southern slavery had been at least, one of the institutions of a stable society. The new industrial slavery was to be mere brute force acting upon chaos. It had been a dogma of the Jeffersonian political philosophy to be intensely suspicious of an industrialism which replaced thought by superficial culture, democracy by hypnosis, and did violence to reason in holding up wealth rather than happiness as the end of man. . . . Calhoun, in his time, saw growing up that new spirit of the age which thought appetite as a thing merely to be indulged, not merely as a thing to be feared, watched and controlled. . . . Was he not enormously right in his foresight? How much understanding of that old Southern life would he have found in the new generations of Henry Fords and Carnegies and Rockefellers? (pp. 168-69.)

²March 1, 1930, p. 6.

³"Bibliographical Notes," Jefferson Davis, p. 303. Not all reviewers shared Tate's enthusiasm for The American Heresy. Henry Steele Commager, for instance, was most harsh in his criticism of its value as history: "This volume is one of the most grotesque travesties on historical interpretation that has been foisted on a gullible public in recent years. The garbled inaccuracies, the accumulated misinformation and the slap-dash style tend to obscure for the reader the outlines of the heresy. . . ." (Books, April 27, 1930, p. 10.) The reviewer for the London Times Literary Supplement had also questioned it as history: "His 'superior person' attitude vitiates his book from first to last. . . . [he] shows a carelessness about facts which makes it impossible to regard the volume as a serious contribution to history." (February 2, 1928, p. 81.)

work appeared to bolster Agrarian answers to Northern attacks on the South.

Books and authors concerned more specifically with the values of Southern agrarianism as a way of life, as opposed to the dangers of industrialism, were also not without representation in the thinking of the Agrarians. This is not to argue that there was a direct cause-effect relationship, but certainly the point of view as represented in Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia, for instance, or John Taylor's Arator, were familiar and welcomed. Not even a quaintness of expression serves to distinguish Taylor's analysis of an argument (that manufacturing will make Americans independent of foreign nations) from remarks made by the Agrarians more than a century later:

By exchanging hardy, honest, and free husbandmen for the classes necessary to reduce the number of agriculturists, low enough to raise the prices of their products, shall we become more independent of foreign nations? What! Secure our independence by bankers and capitalists? Secure our independence by impoverishing, discouraging, and annihilating nine-tenths of our sound yeomanry? By turning them into swindlers, and dependents upon a master capitalist for daily bread?¹

Nor did the Agrarians confine themselves solely to American defenses of agrarianism or attacks on industrialization; Allen Tate spoke of William Cobbett, English journalist, Radical, MP, "a countryman, with an unconquerable instinct for the land and the men of the land,"² of Ruskin, of Carlyle's

¹Arator; being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical and Political (2nd ed., rev. and enl., 1814), p. 22.

²G.D.H. Cole, Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory, Oxford University, Encyclopedia Britannica (1957), vol. V, 905. Cobbett's interests were wide--political, social, economic, linguistic; but the two works of interest to the Agrarians were A Year's Residence in America, an account of his experiences and observations as a farmer in Long Island, New York and in Pennsylvania, where he lived from 1817 to 1819, and Rural Rides, describing his journeying through English counties from 1821 to 1832. The subtitle of A Year's Residence is wonderfully descriptive of the book's scope and

Sartor Resartus, of Hilaire Belloc's The Servile State--all as having some appeal and importance in their thinking.¹ And Davidson found support in two contemporary American works, Ralph Borsodi's Our Ugly Civilization and James Truslow Adams' Our Business Civilization. To Tate he wrote: "Such books as Borsodi's . . . indicate a drift of opinion that is very much in our favor. I'm reading these now, and commend them to you. . . ."² Borsodi's attack on the factory system for its effects--the stultification of individuality, ugliness, the demand for practicality--were points the Agrarians were also discovering and emphasizing. It is not surprising that Davidson found in Borsodi an agrarian's affinity:

Factory-dominated America is slowly but surely destroying its idealists by making laws, schools, and all other popular institutions "practical." . . . In America

content: "Treating of the face of the country, the climate, the soil, the products, the mode of cultivating the land, the prices of land, of labour, of food, of raiment; of the expenses of housekeeping and of the usual manner of living; of the manners and customs of the people, and of the county, civil, political, and religious." Through his factual detailing of raising crops, costs, etc., Cobbett's delight in farming radiates. He found America "truly a country of farmers. Here, Governors, Legislators, Presidents, all are farmers. A farmer here is not the poor dependent wretch. . . . A farmer here depends on nobody but himself and on his own proper means; . . ." [p. xviii] It was such a nation of independent, intelligent farmers that the Agrarians sought to re-establish: "There are," wrote Cobbett, "very few really ignorant men in America of native growth. Every farmer is more or less of a reader. . . . No class like that which the French call peasantry." [p. 157] In his accounts of his travels through England Cobbett paused to note not only some of the agrarian attractions of the areas but also some of the abuses. Except for topical allusions, he might have been criticizing the effects of urbanization and tenant farming: "Is a nation richer for the carrying away of the food from those who raise it, and giving it to bayonet-men and others, who are assembled in great masses? I could broom-stick the fellow who would look me in the face and call this 'an improvement.' What! was it not better for the consumers of the food to live near to the places where it was grown?" (Rural Rides [London, 1912], II, 93.)

¹ Interview, April 23, 1957.

² Letter, October 26, 1929.

"business as usual" is not a mere slogan--it is a holy and patriotic virtue.

. . . the individual is made to produce not what he can best produce but that which a factory civilization can best utilize. He is either prevented from expressing himself altogether, or his contribution is perverted so that it neither satisfies himself nor lessens the ugliness of civilization. . .¹

James Truslow Adams' book focused on the commercialization of all aspects of living. Ours was, wrote Adams, "almost wholly a business man's civilization." In contrast to Great Britain's cultural and economic elite who had not yet fallen to a materialistic level since its "aristocracy exerts an influence upon the social manners and customs of the people at large which is incomparably greater than that exerted by the . . . wealthier . . . untitled bankers, shipping merchants, iron manufacturers and what not," American leaders are the businessmen. "Their ideals, their manners, their way of life, their standard of success are . . . those which the great mass of Americans, consciously or not, strive to make their own."² As a result, Adams asserted--as did the Agrarians--the American businessman almost alone controlled the direction of his culture's economic, social, intellectual, religious and political life. And his preoccupation with profit tends to make him "blind to the aesthetic quality in life."³

¹ This Ugly Civilization (New York, 1929), pp. 4, 454. Borsodi and his plan for "organic households" had a vogue in the early thirties. It was his belief that men would be happier living on small farms and producing everything they could including cloth by home weaving to make themselves self-sufficient. "Epistemology, ethics, and esthetics acquire reality," he wrote in his preface to the first edition, "only if related to economics." His program did not preclude the use of machines, for they would eliminate drudgery; but all equipment should be subordinated to its proper role--which was not to be the amassing of huge profits.

² Our Business Civilization (New York, 1929), pp. 11, 15.

³ Ibid., pp. 16, 20. Adams' explanation of the "aesthetic" was much like that found in Fugitive-Agrarian articles at that time: "If one would practise the art of living, he must have the artistic spirit. I do not mean the aesthetic in its narrower meaning, but the spirit of the man who finds joy in his own creating of something beautiful or noble or lovely." (Our Business Civilization, p. 303.)

Undoubtedly there were other immediate "influences" which in subtle, indefinable ways modified or focused or reaffirmed the views of the Agrarians. This is not to suggest that the development of the symposium can be explained primarily in terms of books or ideas from other thinkers; to so conclude is to misrepresent the character of the movement. But no man--or group--is an island unto itself. Nor were the Agrarians lonely prophets crying in the wilderness; they welcomed the support they found from a wide array of influential and distinguished thinkers.

Most of the contributors lived part of their lives in the city of Nashville and in the state of Tennessee, a fact that was not without some importance in considering the development of the symposium. For Nashville, a trade and commercial center, reflected both the character and the changes occurring throughout the South. It was located in the natural line of industrial invasion, it was the major publishing center--chiefly of religious material--south of the Mason-Dixon line; its population was increasing rapidly with large numbers moving in from rural areas and small towns as a labor supply for new factories and businesses. In the decade from 1920 to 1930 the population of the city grew by almost 36,000. Matthew Arnold's label for the city--"a citadel of Philistinism"--was replaced by "the Athens of the South" and to support the claim, citizens could point to the fact that it had the largest concentration of educational institutions (both white and Negro)¹ in the region, a costly replica of the Parthenon--"symbol of its peculiar devotion to culture,"² and many public

¹A total of twelve colleges and universities include, in addition to Vanderbilt, the George Peabody College for Teachers, Scarritt College, David Lipscomb College, Belmont College; and for Negroes Fisk University, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College, and Meharry Medical College.

²Henry Wells, Poet and Psychiatrist, Merrill Moore, M.D., p. 19. Originally Nashville's Parthenon was erected in plaster for the Centennial of 1897 to commemorate Tennessee's admission to statehood. It was permanently cast in concrete during the decade from 1921-1931. Clarence Poe, editor of the Progressive Farmer, considered it "one of the few art museums worthy of the name to which the South can lay claim. . . ." ("America Discovers Dixie," Review of Reviews, LXXIII (April, 1926), 385.

buildings of Grecian architecture, most notable of which is the state Capitol, considered the masterpiece of William Strickland, who had designed it after an Ionic temple. Nashville was a city located in the heart of Fundamentalism, but many of its churches were responding to liberalizing forces, a development which led William Jennings Bryan to denounce it as "a center of Modernism in the South."

Characteristics of the state, too, were to be reflected in the symposium. Tennessee has been described as one of the nation's most dependable agrarian areas. In 1930 almost twice as many Tennesseans were living on farms as in cities, and the character of the farming was diversified--particularly in the Middle Tennessee area. At the same time, industrialization was advancing rapidly; during a sixteen-year period (from 1923 to 1939) only one state exceeded Tennessee in the increase of manufacturing.¹ One of her native sons, Agrarian Andrew Lytle, found in the agrarian character of the state a relation to her tradition:

Tennessee was a part of the Old West. It has been laid waste by Civil War; but because its tradition was old enough to have roots and because it was a general farming country--particularly stock farming which requires greater humanity than specialized planting--and again because Tennessee was a border state and returned quickly to the Union, it missed the extreme waste of Reconstruction and was able to resume fairly quickly a pattern of life.²

It was this pattern the Fugitives and later most of the Agrarians were heir to, a pattern which was markedly similar to that in other Southern agrarian regions. It included that sense of place which involved an identification with a particular area, with a farm located in a particular county. "County traditions," wrote a Federal Writers' Project author, "are so strong that the individual, however far he migrates, continues

¹A. D. Albright and Gene H. Sloan, Tennessee, Current and Historic Facts (Nashville: State Department of Education, 1948), p. 34.

²"Note on a Traditional Sensibility," p. 371.

to feel loyal to his native county and usually identifies himself with his section. Ask a Tennessean where he lives, and he does not say, 'I'm from Dyersburg,' but rather, 'I'm from Dyer County in Western Tennessee.'¹

The Sectional Temper

But the Southerner's loyalty extended beyond his farm, his county, or even his state; his was an identification with a whole section, with a geographic area that nourished a way of life. The threats to what the Agrarians regarded as the Southern genre de vie² were not a new manifestation; they can, in fact, be traced back to the nineteenth century and, in an explicit formulation, to Henry W. Grady, that prophet, creator, and proclaimer of the idea of the "New South" as a myth.³

The Development of the New South

The term "the New South" is a problematic one which even Southern historian C. Vann Woodward would have preferred to avoid. It cannot be simply defined in terms of a geographical and a chronological span of place and time. Nor is it a

¹Tennessee: A Guide to the State (New York, 1939), p. 5.

²This term with its cluster of meanings attached by Vidal de la Blache, a human geographer of the early twentieth century, seems particularly appropriate in this context. De la Blache's genre de vie represented the totality of existence, an expression embodying everything that makes up a whole way of life. It assumes there is a tradition which involves economic, social, cultural factors, even manner of expression.

³Myth is used here to characterize a collective belief built up to represent the views and attitudes of a group toward a particular convergence of facts, events, and situations. In a literary context, as used by contemporary critics, myths are "dramatic or narrative embodiments of a people's perceptions of the deepest truths." (C. Hugh Holman, A Handbook to Literature [rev. and enl.; New York, 1960], p. 299.) In this socio-economic context myth of the New South represents both the conscious and unconscious formulation of a set of convictions about the nature and character of the South under the impact of industrialism. See the ensuing discussion for specific aspects of the myth of the New South and see above, p. 112, n. 2 for Warren's use of the term in relation to history and poetry.

term that represents solely the industrialization and urbanization of what had constituted the Confederacy. It has become an expression with strong partisan connotations: "From the beginning," said Professor Woodward, "it had the color of a slogan, a rallying cry. It vaguely set apart those whose faith lay in the future from those whose heart was with the past."¹ The "newness" of the New South was generally attributed to a change in its basic economy from agrarianism to industrialism and to a shift in emphasis from sectional differences to national similarities. Those who were enthusiastic supporters of a "New" South were optimistic; those who questioned what it would do to a "Southern" way of life lamented what seemed to them a confusion between means and ends, for they believed that even in the eighties and nineties mere quantity, material goods, the amassing of dollars had become values by which all other elements of civilization were being measured. The critics of the attempt to create the "New South" regarded her advocates as scalawags, traitors, Yankees in iron clothing. Donald Davidson's recent definition represents a sectional "unreconstructed" point of view: the New South with a capital "N" may be defined, he declared, as "the expectation that the North has of the South" and the South's response to that expectation--a wishful image of a "South that accepts or submits to Northern views and becomes as much like the North as possible, no matter how great the injury to Southern beliefs and principles. . . ."²

Historically the expression is generally attributed to Henry W. Grady³ whose now famous address in 1886 at a dinner

¹Origins of the New South, 1877-1913 (Baton Rouge, 1951), p. ix.

²"The New South and the Conservative Tradition," pp.4,7.

³H. C. Nixon, in Lower Piedmont Country, points out that Grady was said to have used the term "New South" in an editorial as early as March 14, 1874, when he endorsed a plan "to build Atlanta's first cotton mill by public subscription. . . . For the next fifteen years of his life he made constant and consistent use of the words and ideas. . . ."[p. 51] Sidney Lanier defined and used the term as a synonym for small

in New York set forth explicitly the beliefs that were to be identified as tenets of "the New South" faith. Speaking before the New England Society, he pictured with glowing optimism, aims to be sought by New Southerners: the reconciliation between the North and South, with the bitterness of loss forgotten--"The South found her jewel in the toad's head of defeat"¹; a recognition of the need for education, for the development of natural resources, for encouraging diversified industry through the investment of both Northern and Southern capital. The Old South, Grady declared, was dead, except in a sentimental sense, but the existing South was not to be humiliated because of the past; its convictions were as honest as the North's. With hopeful mythologizing, Grady asserted:

The New South presents a perfect democracy. The oligarch leading in the popular movement; a social system compact and closely knitted less splendid on the surface, but stronger at the core, a hundred farms for every plantation,

diversified farming; in "The New South," published by Scribner's Monthly (1880) he focused on an agrarian "New South"; for him it meant "the quiet rise of the small farmer." Comparing large-scale farming in the Northwest to a manufacturing company, Lanier contributed to a reviving myth of the Jeffersonian independent yeoman who raised his own meat and made his own bread, "for which there are no notes in bank"; fed his pigs with homegrown corn, spun his yarn, knit his stockings, made his butter and sold eggs and chickens. [pp. 840-41, 843] Lanier's definition of the "New South" did not, however, become attached to the concept. It was, said historian C. Vann Woodward, "an inspired vision" but "it represented everything that the Southern farmer was not and had not." (Origins of the New South, p. 175.)

²"The New South," The Complete Orations and Speeches of Henry W. Grady (New York, 1910), II, 18. Grady, editor of the Atlanta Constitution, wielded a magic that for many Southerners of the late nineteenth century was equalled only by the name of Robert E. Lee. Donald Davidson, whose middle name is Grady, recalls, "I can truly report to you that I am a living symbol of Southern faith in that name. When I was born, . . . it was my father, a hopeful young schoolteacher, who chose for his son's middle name the name of the admirable Peacemaker--Grady. And I dutifully exulted in it until, through some uneasiness that I cannot explain, I discarded it in early college days and have since avoided it except for purposes of legal identification." ("Counterattack, 1930-1940," p. 33.)

fifty homes for every palace; and a diversified industry that meets the complex needs of this complex age.¹

Journalist Walter Hines Page, in some respects one of the most influential Southern "Yankee-izers," at first succeeded only in getting himself denounced for his progressive ideas--he advocated free public education for both blacks and whites, scientific farming, the creation of local industries, and the building of public highways. But with his address, "The Forgotten Man," delivered in 1897 to the women of the State Normal and Industrial School at Greensboro, North Carolina, Page launched a campaign against illiteracy and inadequate education that was to unite Southern leaders and Northern philanthropists in a common cause: free public schooling and wide improvements in the entire educational system. The "New South" aspect of Page's analysis is apparent not only in what he envisioned but also in what he attacked. Both the class system and the church with their concern for the privileged (classical education and theological training) had failed to provide an education for the masses. In 1890, he pointed out, 26 per cent of the white population of North Carolina were unable to read or write²--and the result was that the forgotten man became "a definite opponent of social progress." The preacher, said Page, told this forgotten man that God meant his poverty as a means of grace; and the politician, that what was good enough for his father was good enough for him. "These influences encouraged inertia."³ The solution is to improve

¹"The New South," II, 19.

²The situation was not much better in other sections of the South. In 1901 those who were lucky enough to go to school averaged only eighty-seven days a year. The proportion of native-white illiterates in the South in 1900 was about 12 per cent compared to the national average of 4.6 per cent. North Carolina still had almost 20 per cent and Tennessee had 14.2. Negro illiteracy was appallingly high, nearly 50 per cent although it had been reduced 25 per cent in two decades. (C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, p. 400.)

³"The Forgotten Man," The Rebuilding of Old Commonwealths (New York, 1902), pp. 22-23.

the schools. Free public education, for Negroes as well as for forgotten white men and women, will bring rewards that will produce a South different from anything it had been; but a resistance to such a program, said Page, would mean a continuation of her poverty, her conservatism, her hostility to liberal opinions. His crusade for education continued; linking social growth to public education in a commencement address, "The School That Built a Town," Page in rhetorical flourishes asked:

Is any man here opposed to building a good schoolhouse in every school-district of Georgia; and to employing the best teachers in the world and to making the school a training-place for every child in the district--one for whites and one for blacks? If you hold these notions, you are a dead weight in Georgia. You are one of the reasons why its property is not now worth five times what it is. You are one of the reasons why the products of the soil are not five times as great as they are, for such schools as I mean would make most farmers highly successful farmers. . . . You are one of the reasons why Georgia is not one of the greatest manufacturing States in the Union, for such schools . . . would turn thousands of the best trained hands and minds to the making of beautiful and useful things. You are one of the reasons why the Georgians have not more scholars, more orators, more organizers of industry, more owners of beautiful homes, more horses and cattle, and grass and fruit and more good roads. . . . Last of all, you are not a democrat. You have never thoroughly read Thomas Jefferson. You do not know that his ideal State was a State in which every man was trained at public expense. You are a frayed-out "knight" of feudal times with a faded plume--you think in terms of the Middle Ages; and the sooner you know it the better for the community.¹

Page's creed for education (which he asked audiences to recite in chorus) might even have been a motto for later New South advocates whose energies were directed to economic matters: "The more men we train, the more wealth everyone may create. I believe in the perpetual regeneration of society, in the immortality of democracy, and in growth everlasting."²

¹Given at the State Normal School, Athens, Georgia, in 1901, ibid., pp. 74-76.

²Ibid., p. 102.

On the question of race, Page was likewise "liberal"; slavery, he believed, was one of three influences which has held Southern social structure stationary--it "pickled all Southern life"--and the degradation of both the white man and the Negro would be changed only if the Negro had the same kind of training as the white: "Training to economic independence is the only true emancipation." Thus, for Page--and for many other Southerners seeking to remove the stigma of "backwardness" from their country--industrialization became the goal, education the means, and "progress" the philosophical justification.

But Grady and Page were not the only spokesmen for the New South, although they were probably the most influential. They were joined by a host of businessmen, by Chamber of Commerce leaders, by editorial writers anxious to convince Northern capital that the South would be hospitable to investments. And all were outspoken in their Yankee-adulation. By the turn of the century the South had already begun to surrender to the wave of industrial values which had inundated various sections. Daniel Augustus Tompkins--North Carolinian industrialist--chief owner and president of three large cotton mills, director of eight others, manufacturer and distributor of cotton mill machinery and contributor to the Manufacturers' Record, preached "laissez-faire capitalism, freed of all traditional restraints, together with a new philosophy and way of life and a new scale of values."¹ Henry Watterson, editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal, told a New York audience in 1877, "New England must be pre-eminently happy, for the ambition of the South is to out-Yankee the Yankee."² Even sections of the Deep South were enchanted by the siren-song of progress; a Vicksburg, Mississippi, newspaper declared, "We are in favor of the South from the Potomac to the Rio Grande being thoroughly and permanently Yankeeized."³ During his trip through the South in the

¹C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, p. 148.

²Quoted in the New York Tribune, November 21, 1877, ibid., p. 151.

³Vicksburg Herald, quoted ibid., p. 151.

eighties, Mark Twain commented on the presence and character of the New South businessman type: "Brisk men, energetic of movement and speech; the dollar their god, how to get it their religion."¹ Editor of the Manufacturers' Record, Richard Edmonds implied that "the real South" was a capitalistic, industrial urbanized South--through which could be heard "a continuous . . . unbroken strain of . . . 'the music of progress--the whirr of the spindle, the buzz of the saw, the roar of the furnace and the throb of the locomotive'."² Such a description might have seemed prophetic as a characterization before 1900, but there was sufficient evidence to justify the vision as reality.

Artificial stimulants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to extract capital from the North and from England, and to bring industries to the South had worked; cities had vied with each other in building factories; chambers of commerce, merchants' associations and town councils rewarded factories with tax exemptions, free sites, and full immunity from hampering regulations. Some financing was done by local capital before the turn of the century but Yankee and English capital flowed South in increasing quantities after 1877.³ A native of Alabama observed in the mid twenties:

Hardly a day passes that the Alabama press does not give notice of the founding of a new industry in what used to be the smaller agricultural towns of the Cotton Belt. . . . it was forward-looking go-getting men who issued the invitation to a million dollar mill to locate in Opelika, and it was a Chamber of Commerce in Tuscaloosa that offered a

¹ Life on the Mississippi (New York: Bantam Books, 1945), p. 278.

² Quoted by Woodward, p. 174.

³ After the panic of 1893 New York financiers gained control of the South's railroads. Coal and oil production of West Virginia, the American Tobacco Company, the Tennessee Coal and Iron and Railroad Company all became part of nationwide trusts; the bauxite industry of Arkansas was controlled by the Aluminum Company of America. Some Southern newspapers became part of national chains. In short, "the New South's industry was caught in the dragnet of Yankee finance." (William Hessel-tine, The South in American History [Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1943], pp. 584 ff.)

factory-free site to another million dollar mill to induce it to come down from Massachusetts. Tuscaloosa--historic, aristocratic Tuscaloosa, the first capital of Alabama, the ancestral home of the first families, the birthplace of the University--now extends a welcome to 3,000 factory hands, bidding them to make themselves at home.

It is difficult to imagine it. . . . its citizens have always been conservative, fastidious . . . ; in a word, distinguished. Until very lately they lifted a scornful eyebrow at the Uplift, Kiwanis, and the apocalyptic hundred percenters of the Chambers of Commerce. A man of a town that proselyted was the dirt under their feet. . . . In another five years, I suppose, the old glow of such lovely towns as Tuscaloosa, Athens, Marion, and Eufaula will have vanished, and the Pittsburghs and Newarks of the South will rise in their stead. . . .¹

The industrializing did continue. A professor of journalism at Alabama reported early in 1931 that fourteen communities of the South had raised nearly six million dollars over the previous five years for purposes of promotion: Atlanta had appropriated \$1,250,000 for four years; New Orleans had spent \$142,000 annually on a national industrial campaign; and after 1925 ten communities in Florida reported an expenditure of \$3,600,000.²

The result was that by 1930 the production of Southern manufacturing had increased enormously. In the first quarter of the century, for example, the value of Southern products increased by 460 per cent. Southern mills by the twenties were producing more than half the cotton goods in the nation and by 1929 more than sixty per cent of the cotton mill workers were Southern.³ Atlanta proclaimed herself the "New York of the South." Birmingham, a Pittsburgh, characterized as "the next capital of the Steel Age," was to be explained, wrote a journalist in 1927, "only in terms of the South as a whole, and of the South viewed (as it should be) as the present industrial

¹Sara Haardt, "Alabama," The American Mercury, VI (September, 1925), 85-86.

²Clarence Cason, "Is the South Advancing?" Yale Review, XX (March, 1931), 505.

³Hesseltine, p. 585-86.

frontier of these new United States . . ."¹ The strident voice of the New South said, "Grinning Sam is labor. White and black, he constitutes what one of the shrewdest business economists of the South, George Gordon Crawford, terms 'the greatest, best, and cheapest labor market in the United States.'"² The pontifical voice of the New South justified the revolution in Southern economy by implying that the voice of "progress" is the voice of God--as a speaker did before the "Social Service" conference of the Southern textile industry:

The pioneers of Southern industry were pioneers of God, they were prophets of God doing what God wanted done. Southern industry is a divine institution. When the first whistles blew the people flocked to the light from barren places. These cotton mills were established that people might find themselves and be found. It is a spiritual movement.³

The optimistic voice of the "progressive" agrarian in 1926 predicted:

Certainly the South to-day is recognized the nation over as the new "Land of Opportunity." In fact, it is the last great undeveloped section of the North Temperate Zone, it is one place left for pioneering on a vast scale. . . . the next fifty years, 1925-1975, will see in the South the development of a rich, powerful and symmetrical civilization which has been justly our due since the days of Sir Walter Raleigh and Captain John Smith. . . .⁴

Advertisements from Southern Chambers of Commerce in the 1920's sold Northern capital on a "wide margin of profit . . . due to abundant power, tax inducements, encouragement by railways, proximity of raw materials, and 'adaptable Anglo-Saxon labor.'"⁵ The South, since the first World War, was

¹ Neil M. Clark, "Birmingham--the Next Capital of the Steel Age," World's Work, LIII (March, 1927), 534.

² Ibid.

³ Quoted by Stringfellow Barr, "Shall Slavery Come to the South?" Virginia Quarterly Review, VI (October, 1930), 489.

⁴ Clarence Poe, editor of The Progressive Farmer, "America Discovers Dixie," p. 371.

⁵ "Shall Slavery Come to the South?" p. 491.

buying progress, "deserting" its glorious bloody past for a rosy and profitable future," "turning its traditions into points of interest."¹

As companies built mill villages, as industries were moved to the South or new industries were developed to utilize natural resources, as "Anglo-Saxon" labor moved out of the hills into towns to tend the whirring spindles in the textile mills, the demographic profile of a defeated land began to change rapidly, and indeed, so markedly that it is not surprising that the South even by 1930 was provoking certain of her sons to a kind of horrified lamentation. In 1900, for instance, the highest urban percentage was in Louisiana; by 1950 this high point was below the lowest percentage--in Mississippi: In 1900 fifteen out of one hundred Southerners could have been classed as urban residents while the national average was forty-three out of one hundred. By 1930 the Southern urban population had jumped to 32.1 per cent. Between 1920 and 1930 the national increase was 5 per cent while in the South for the same period it was 7.6 per cent. Tennessee's rate of urbanization, for example, was greater than the sectional average: from its ten per cent urban population in 1900, it reached 34.3 per cent by 1930, and in the decade between 1920 and 1930 it increased 8.2 per cent.² Birmingham grew from a town of 38,000 in 1900 to the "magic city" of 200,000 in 1926.³ Recognition of such changes is implicit in the conclusion that "persistence of provincial cultural qualities would be vastly less likely as the distribution of the people between town and country changes in such proportions."⁴

Although the South had succeeded in remaining the most

¹Stringfellow Barr, "The Uncultured South," Virginia Quarterly Review, V (April, 1929), 192.

²John MacLachan and Joe Floyd, Jr., This Changing South (Gainesville, Fla., 1956), pp. 28-29.

³Clarence Poe, "America Discovers Dixie," p. 370.

⁴MacLachan and Floyd, p. 29.

rural section of the nation during the eighties and nineties--the first phase of its New South metamorphosis, farmers through the 1920's could or no longer wished to maintain an "integrity" which had come to mean indebtedness, sharecropping or tenancy, a bare subsistence, a living characterized by almost none of the amenities of civilization. Agrarianism as a philosophy had many appeals--aesthetic, religious, personal; but farming as a means of earning a living in the South was so beset by a variety of harsh realities that the exodus from rural areas was estimated at the rate of two million a year after 1922. Foreclosures were common. From 1921 until the end of the decade bankruptcies had consistently increased over the preceding year and by 1928 there were six times as many as in 1921. Some farmers, disgusted with the meager returns, the long hours of hard work, the harassments of labor shortage, droughts, plant diseases, livestock epidemics, boll weevils, storms and floods, and falling markets, found the allurements of a promised eight- to ten-hour day and a regular pay check irresistible. A survey of one county in Tennessee--a section of "splendid farm land"--revealed that in one year during the 1920's seventy-five per cent of the farmers were "either selling, renting, or abandoning their farms." Although many of these farms would be worked by others, the conception given--writes an agricultural journalist-farmer--is pretty clearly of "the reckless spirit . . . pervading the ranks of agriculture."¹ Such a spirit was a predictable reaction to a distressing situation: farm indebtedness near the end of the decade amounted to one-third the estimated farm value; loan companies, willing to lend only up to half of a farm's value, were begging farmers to remain on the land and pay what they could; many former owners who were forced into tenancy could no longer afford to care for the soil properly by crop rotations and artificial fertilizers. The economic returns were so poor near the end of the decade that even if a farmer had no taxes, interest, or debt to pay, even if he could count every dollar he

¹Ross Holman, "The Flight from the Farm," North American Review, CCXXVII (April, 1929), 483.

took in as profit, "he would not then be making as much as a Chicago bricklayer or plasterer on full-time employment"-- "this . . . on an average investment of \$13,000 . . ."¹

This was the South to which some of the Fugitives were awakening in the later nineteen-twenties, a South of a declining agrarian culture and a burgeoning industrial-urban civilization. "We had been devoting ourselves almost entirely to poetry and criticism without giving much attention to public affairs," said Donald Davidson. "We rubbed our eyes and looked around in astonishment and apprehension."² What they saw and particularly what they read appalled and angered them: ". . . old and historic communities were crawling on their bellies to persuade some petty manufacturer of pants or socks to take up his tax-exempt residence in their midst."³

Attacks on the South

But even such evidences, humiliating as they were, might have been ignored if only Northern journalists and "traitorous" Southerners of the Menckonian ilk had not launched their degrading attacks. The Fugitive-Agrarians were men of letters; frequent and increasingly derisive charges of "backwardness" in Northern newspapers and liberal journals could not be permitted to stand unchallenged. The South, Mencken had written, was "that stupendous region of fat farms, shoddy cities and paralyzed cerebrums . . . that gargantuan paradise of the fourth-rate," "a vast plain of mediocrity, stupidity, lethargy, almost of dead silence" stretching between "senile" Virginia and "crass, gross, vulgar and obnoxious" Georgia.⁴ Davidson saw the attacks as a "cold Civil War" beginning soon after the Treaty of Versailles when "the South became a major target area in a long sustained bombardment . . . by no means

¹Ibid., p. 485.

²"Counterattack, 1930-1940," p. 37.

³Davidson, "I'll Take My Stand: A History," p. 304.

⁴Prejudices, Second Series (New York, 1920), pp. 136 ff.

merely verbal." The South, it was charged, was suffering from a cultural lag: its literature was sentimental; its people, largely illiterate; how could it expect to produce literature and art?

We were religious bigots. We were Ku Kluxers. We were lynchers. We had hookworm, we had pellagra, we had sharecroppers, we had poll taxes, we had poor whites, we had fundamentalists. We did not have enough schools, colleges, Ph. D.'s, Deans of Education, paved roads, symphony orchestras, public libraries, skyscrapers--and not near enough cotton mills, steel mills, labor unions, modern plumbing. But we had too many U.D.C.'s, D.A.R.'s, W.C.T.U.'s, too many Methodists and Baptists, too many one-horse farms, too many illiterates, too many Old Colonels. . . . Our preachers encouraged their flocks to indulge in religious orgies. That was, it was claimed, the only relief we could get from our dull rural life--except the lynching of Negroes. We were a bad lot, a disgrace to the United States--and the only possible salvation for us was through instructions from Northern sources.¹

These were the "crimes" the South had committed against progress. By 1920 the New York World had initiated an exposé of a revived Ku Klux Klan, and throughout the decade demands for the annihilation of the Klan, further revelations of its dangerous power, bigotry, and corruption continued to appear in Southern newspapers as well as in Northern journals like the New Republic, the American Mercury, Current History, and the Nation; distinguished Southern writers and political figures joined in the general condemnation of the Klan: Gerald W. Johnson, Douglas Freeman, Virginius Dabney, Grover Hall²; Carter Glass of Virginia, Senator Oscar Underwood of Alabama, and Governor Thomas Hardwick whose political career ended because he unmasked the Klan in Georgia.³ It was noted that leadership of the Klan, which had been revived as a Southern small-town movement against relaxed mores and the improved

¹"Counterattack, 1930-1940," pp. 35-36.

²Hall's editorials against the Klan in the Montgomery Advertiser won him the Pulitzer prize for journalism.

³W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South, pp.340-41.

position of the Negro, was appallingly bad everywhere (in the Midwest as well as the South), "relying on increasingly large doses of vicious doctrines of hatred to keep control of the rank and file."¹

But perhaps the most famous single attack on the South was Mencken's "Sahara of the Bozart"; it served as a kind of symbol and nether pole for all the volleys launched through the twenties against the South as a cultural wasteland. His sweeping condemnations were certain to infuriate Southerners who gloried in the greatness of their past, while they would delight observers whose own views of the South were corroborated by his rhetorical exaggerations:

Down there a poet is now almost as rare as an oboe player, or a dry-point etcher or a metaphysician. It is, indeed, amazing to contemplate so vast a vacuity. . . . for all its size and all its wealth and all the 'progress' it babbles of, it is almost as sterile, artistically, intellectually, culturally, as the Sahara Desert. . . .

In all that gargantuan paradise of the fourth-rate there is not a single picture gallery worth going into, or a single orchestra capable of playing the nine symphonies of Beethoven, or a single opera-house, or a single theater devoted to decent plays, or a single public monument (built since the war) that is worth looking at, or a single work-shop devoted to the making of beautiful things. . . . when you come to critics, musical composers, painters, sculptors, architects and the like, you will have to give up, for there is not even a bad one between the Potomac mud-flats and the Gulf. Nor an historian. Nor a sociologist. Nor a philosopher. Nor a theologian. Nor a scientist. In all these fields the south is an awe-inspiring blank--. . . .²

But this was just one man's view; the issue on which most Northern and Southern liberals united to deride the South in general and Tennessee in particular with harsh and insulting attacks was the Scopes trial.³ Joseph Wood Krutch, a native Tennessean who had moved to the North and had been sent by the Nation to cover the trial, charged public figures with

¹"The Rise and Fall of the K.K.K.," New Republic, LIII (November 30, 1927), 34.

²Prejudices: Second Series, pp. 136, 138-39.

³See Appendix G, "The Scopes Trial."

dishonesty and cowardice--from the Governor down through legislators and educators; "In Tennessee bigotry is militant and sincere; intelligence is timid and hypocritical, and in that fact lies the explanation of the sorry role which [Dayton] is playing in contemporary history. Dayton's only crime is the naive belief that a law may be intended to be enforced."¹ It was the scornful tone in editorials and articles that created in some of the Fugitive-Agrarians a resentment and determination later to "do something" for the South. When H. L. Mencken wrote before the trial what ostensibly appeared to be a defense of a state's right to determine what its children should be taught, it became apparent to anyone sensitive to the heavy irony and flamboyant sarcasm of his style that Tennessee--and the fundamentalist South--were being charged with simple-minded stupidity. Davidson's description of Mencken as a vulgar rhetorician was elicited by such comments as this trenchant ridicule of Tennesseans:

What could be of greater utility to the son of a Tennessee mountaineer than an education making him a good Tennessean, content with his father, at peace with his neighbors, dutiful to the local religion, and docile under the local mores?

That is all the Tennessee anti-evolution law seeks to accomplish. . . . The State, to a degree that should be gratifying, has escaped the national standardization. Its people . . . retain, among other things, the anthropomorphic religion of an elder day. They do not profess it; they actually believe in it. The Old Testament, to them, is not a mere sacerdotal whizz-bang, to be read for its pornography; it is an authoritative history, and the transactions recorded in it are as true as the story of Barbara Frietchie, or that of Washington and the cherry tree, . . .

. . . A pedagogue, properly so called--and a high-school teacher in a country town is properly so-called--is surely not a searcher for knowledge. His job in this world is simply to pass on what has been chosen and approved by his superiors. . . . He is a workingman, not a thinker. . . . If he would be true to his oath he must be very careful to say nothing that is in violation of the communal mores, the communal magic, the communal notion of the good, the beautiful, the true.²

¹"Tennessee: Where Cowards Rule," Nation, CXXI (July 15, 1925), 88-89.

²"In Tennessee," Nation, CXXI (July 1, 1925), 21-22.

When the trial began an editorial writer for the Nation declared, "The prosecution . . . ought to be cried out by the court clerk as the State of Tennessee vs. Truth."¹ To Southerners, conscious of the values of their heritage, the implications of this "versus" were unmistakable: Tennessee with her Fundamentalist religion was shadowed in falsehood while the defenders of modern science were enveloped in an aura of truth. In this light it is not difficult to understand how their fury was aroused. The assumption was that the fault for such a sorry state of affairs lay with rural native Americans. The South and West, an editorialist argued, were the areas most anxiously agitating for such restrictions as Tennessee's "Monkey Law":

Those sections are primarily rural and the anti-evolution movement has its springs in the small towns and back blocks. Its champions are mostly among our much-praised native-American stock. They are the people who are generally held up as the safe-deposit vault of our ancient national virtues, but actually--all too often--a people . . . [who] have been deprived of the vigor they brought into the world and left without leadership, a fine soil for fundamentalism, the Ku Klux Klan, and other manifestations of superstition and ignorance.²

Remarks like Mencken's "Tennessee needs only fifteen minutes of free speech to become civilized,"--reported in the Nation; unfavorable publicity that portrayed Dayton as a commercial-minded town capitalizing on its notoriety; implied and overt vilification of fundamentalists' intelligence--all served to stigmatize Tennessee as backward and ignorant, unprogressive and stupidly wrong. Articles attempting to create the electric atmosphere of Dayton reported a variety of details: "You Need God in Your Business," one theological billboard announced. "Drive Hell out of the High Schools," proclaimed T. T. Martin, field secretary of the Anti-Evolution League. "Come and see a motion picture portraying the life of Christ, including his

¹"Tennessee vs. Truth," Nation, CXXI (July 8, 1925), 58.

²Ibid.

birth, his works and miracles . . . , the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and many other such incidents," advertised the Methodist Volunteers during the week of the Scopes trial. Dayton was known as "Monkeyville," wags around the town spoke of the drug store (where it was resolved to test the law) as "Ape's Apothecary," or "Simian's Soda Fountain." The Progressive Dayton Club was organized to provide for the diversion of trial spectators, and it was announced that 30,000 people could be accommodated. A five thousand dollar advertising fund was voted. Dayton citizens were infuriated by a move of a Chattanooga newspaper editor to work up another test case in order to hold a trial before Scopes'. Speakers at a mass meeting in Dayton accused Chattanooga of trying to "ape Dayton," and one citizen shouted caustically, "There are as many monkeys in Chattanooga as there are anti-evolutionists in Dayton." The town barber--furiously yelling "My ancestors weren't monkeys!"--bit Rappleyea, one of the instigators of the test case, while he was trying to explain evolution at a community meeting. Mencken's description of a revival meeting near Dayton elicited from the Baltimore executive secretary of the Association of Commerce a complaint that the "unjust characterization of the people in the South has hurt the city's business." Even the titles of articles were sufficient to arouse resentment of partisan Southerners: "Educational Serfdom," "Inquisition in Tennessee," "Monkey Business in Tennessee," "Tennessee vs. Civilization." And when native-born Southerners, like North Carolinian Nell Battle Lewis, a journalist from an aristocratic family, attacked the anti-evolution bill of her state in tones of scorn, betrayal seemed complete: "There is at present," she wrote, "no spectacle more pathetically ridiculous than legislatures of little Canutes and little Joshuas passing judgment on the natural order and telling the Life Principle how it ought to behave."¹

¹Quoted by Edwin Mims, The Advancing South, p. 248. Details in the above account were derived from the following sources: Joseph Wood Krutch, "Darrow vs. Bryan," Nation, CXXI

It was this "campaign" of vilification that aroused some of the Fugitives to concerns more consciously Southern, less obviously literary and aesthetic. The Scopes trial initiated among Tate, Davidson, Ransom and Owsley in particular a re-evaluation of their heritage and led to the development of a cohesive group attitude. "If you had to pick a date," said Davidson in reconstructing the genesis of I'll Take My Stand, "I think you'd pick 1925, when the Dayton trial set everything aflame. . . . that started a boiling controversy, and . . . a reconsideration--. . . it wasn't the only thing . . . but [it] was . . . one thing that focused it."¹

There were two defenses a Southerner could make in the face of such charges: he could assert that the South really was not unprogressive or backward--witness the industrialization that had been achieved since the Civil War, witness attempts to improve education; or he could admit that the South was "unliberal" in its religion, that it did prefer living close to the land--and perhaps getting along with fewer gadgets and conveniences--in short, that this way of life was at least equivalent, and probably superior to a secularized, materialistic existence. The Fugitives who were becoming Agrarians could not have taken the path of negative reaction blazed out by Edwin Mims, who was maintaining that the South--including Tennessee--was gradually becoming more like the North--liberal, intelligent, interested in science; fundamentalism, he argued, as represented in the Dayton trial and the anti-evolution law really involved only a minority of Southerners. In such articles as "Why the South Is Anti-Evolution," in his letter to the Nation, where he defended the liberalism of Vanderbilt, and in The Advancing South, Mims cited the names and activities of Southerners to prove that the South did not deserve to

(July 29, 1925), 136; William Manchester, Disturber of the Peace, The Life of H. L. Mencken (New York, 1950), pp. 166 ff.; George Fort Milton, editor of the Chattanooga News, "Can Minds Be Closed by Statute?" World's Work, L (July, 1925), 323-28.

¹Fugitives' Reunion, p. 199.

be charged with narrow sectarianism, or belligerent fundamentalism, or hypocritical intelligence; to protest Krutch's Nation articles, Mims wrote: "Vanderbilt for a quarter of a century, and especially since its victorious struggle with the Methodist church over its control, has been generally regarded in the South as a citadel of modernism, higher criticism, evolution, and other forms of heresy." Professor L. C. Glenn of Vanderbilt's Department of Geology, said Mims, did not hesitate to give an illustrated lecture on evolution while the anti-evolution bill was pending in the legislature. Dr. O. E. Brown, dean of the School of Religion, secured signatures of leading ministers of Nashville to protest passage of the law. And Chancellor Kirkland, who for two years had lectured on evolution in Southern institutions, had declared after the Scopes Trial: "The answer to the episode at Dayton is the building of new laboratories on the Vanderbilt campus for the teaching of science." Nor was this all the evidence he could offer: One of the chief protagonists of the forces supporting the teaching of evolution, Mims pointed out, was Dr. W. L. Poteat, President of Baptist Wake Forest College; "for a generation," he has "stood out uncompromisingly as a champion of the theory of evolution," wrote Mims, and his McNair lectures at the University of North Carolina on the relation of science and religion were heard by thousands and were supported by the Board of Trustees and all North Carolina papers but one. "The chief trouble," concluded Mims, is that the South still has a great mass of uneducated people--sensitive, passionate, prejudiced--and another mass of the half-educated, who have very little intellectual curiosity or independence of judgment. . . . today there is a strong and militant body of men ready for battle. The forces of education have had their influence, and industrial progress has carried in its wake an increasing number of broad-minded men."¹

¹ Mims' descriptions of liberal Southerners' attitudes toward evolution were found in the following sources: "Why the South Is Anti-Evolution," World's Work, L (September, 1925), 548-52; "Vanderbilt University's Liberalism," Nation, CXXI (September 30, 1925), 358; The Advancing South, p. 158.

This is what the Fugitive-Agrarians feared--the forces of "modern" education, the effects of industrial progress, this "enlightenment" which "permitted so little of the supernatural to remain, so little even of the textural, the unique, the marvelous to stand."¹ In his reconstruction of the events and thinking that led to I'll Take My Stand, Davidson recalled:

John Ransom astonished his campus friends at Vanderbilt by openly challenging the modernist position and defending Fundamentalism in religion. I recall a tense scene . . . during which Ransom, more excited than I had ever seen him, opposed Dr. Edwin Mims in vigorous argument over the issues raised at Dayton.²

They elected to defend the South on grounds quite different from Mims'--a re-evaluation of Southern "non-progressive" traditions, based on her history, on her ante-bellum social structure, on her economy and religion. Tate wrote biographies of Jefferson Davis and Stonewall Jackson; Davidson turned to his regional heritage in The Tall Men. And John Crowe Ransom began to think about a defense of Fundamentalism which a poet and an intelligent, educated man with a faith could propound. He had been disturbed by the unfairness and bad taste exhibited in the attacks. His personal answer was God Without Thunder, and his evaluation of the Scopes trial--somewhat less vehemently expressed than his argument with Mims must have been--betrays in the very choice of words his preference for the "religionists":

I have not been able to see that either of the belligerents at Dayton escaped with perfect honor. The religionists were teased into giving battle on a field which they were bound to lose. They were infatuated in their devotion, they were so brave that they were foolish.

But the scientists, on the other hand, were so naturalistic and so obtuse, that they lost caste while they were winning the field. They succeeded in their tactics, but they lost in their strategy, for they alienated the public sentiment of the region.³

¹ Cowan, The Fugitive Group, p. 207.

² "Counterattack, 1930-1940," p. 41.

³ God Without Thunder, p. 101.

For at least two of the future Agrarians, the prospects were "horrifying" and "frightening"--"to see the cause of liberal education argued in a Tennessee court by a famous agnostic lawyer from Illinois . . . , to realize that the South was being exposed to a large-scale public detraction" ¹ The connection between the Dayton trial and the publication of a militant symposium was not a mere chance convergence of circumstances; what happened in 1925 in Dayton forged a chain of episodes which (in the opinion of the aroused Vanderbilt men of letters) threatened to fasten on the South the superficial, debilitating, and dehumanized expectations of a "scientific" civilization while it destroyed the spiritual, the unique character of their heritage.

Had the patronizing attacks ceased after the furor of the Scopes trial abated, had the economic changes--the industrializing and urbanizing--slowed down from a revolutionary to an evolutionary rate, even then the Fugitive-Agrarians and those who joined them later might have continued their defenses of the South solely as individuals. But the attacks continued to appear in Northern journals. Bruce Bliven, staff member of the New Republic, so infuriated Donald Davidson, that he wrote Tate:

¹ Davidson, "Counterattack, 1930-1940," p. 40. Davidson's comment also represented Ransom's view. And Allen Tate, considering the implications of the Scopes' trial, had written to Davidson early in 1926 about some of his ideas for an essay on fundamentalism: "My purpose is to define the rights of both parties, science and religion, and I'm afraid I agree with Sanborn that science has very little to say for itself. I remember he used to emphasize that view, but I scoffed at it; I see he was right. The principle is, Science as we inherit it as mechanism from the 17th century has nothing whatever to say about reality: if the Church or a fishmonger asserts that reality is fundamentally cheese or gold dust or Bishop Berkeley's tar water, Science has no right to deny it. On the other hand, the Church has no right to forestall all criticism by simply saying science is wrong. The church these days is of course decayed, but the attack on it should be ethical, not scientific." (March 3, 1926. Quoted by Cowan, The Fugitive Group, p. 243.)

When I read Bruce Bliven . . . , I am willing to take to my bed and turn up my heels--except that I am too mad to die just yet, and itching for a fight, if I could only find some way to fight effectively. If genuine sectional feeling could be aroused there might be some hope; I do not yet venture to say whether that is possible. John Ransom and I are greatly riled; . . . Let us keep thinking about this.
[May 9, 1927]

Bliven's article was Menckonian in purpose, if not in style:

The standardization and proliferation of material things which has [sic] swept over America in the past two decades is as much in evidence in the South as in the Middle West or on the Pacific Coast. Everywhere are new roads, new automobiles, new hot dog stands, tea shops, movie palaces, radio stores, real estate subdivisions, tourist camp grounds. . . . The desperate modernity of these hostelryes is revealed by the fact that in nearly all of them you can now get a room with a shower-bath. To be sure, they are all of the wrong, needle-shower variety, and the handles are still stuck tight with the original paint. But they do exist. . . .

A benighted Yankee who has often wondered what they do about sentimental songs down in the very Mammybelt itself, is glad to report that one hears in Dixie precisely the same ballads which are rife at the same moment on Broadway. . . . In Chattanooga, the singer cries out for his Ma-ha-ha-me down in Te-he-hennessee. Nobody thinks this is funny. It's just a song, mister. It don't mean nothing.¹

The future Agrarians undoubtedly would not have objected to this scornful depiction of the "New South," but to characterize sentimentally as the opposite point of view--"a little oasis in which a dim and musty fragrance of the ancien régime still lingers in old halls, where dust gathers on crossed swords and a forage cap beneath the portrait of General Lee"--or to represent the adherents to the Old South as "gentle aged people who sit about mahogany older than themselves" was to render the evolving Agrarian strategy as futile before it had even been tried.

It would be easy to exaggerate the importance of these external influences, particularly if one focused on bitter responses from members of the group, and ignored for the moment, their common heritage, their devotion to art, and their

¹"Away Down South," New Republic, L (May 4, 1927), 296-97.

personal experiences. Yet the "externalities" of their environment--their relationships and activities at Vanderbilt, their defensive consciousness of their section, and the violent diatribes against the South were of significance. On looking back at the decade before the symposium was published (and it is against this period, not the beginning of the depression that I'll Take My Stand must be viewed), Davidson saw the attacks not as individual forays but as part of a grand strategic plan designed to annihilate everything of value in a way of life that was best represented in the South:

Behind the vituperative particulars, so irritating to the South, we can now detect a more general pattern of condemnation in which the South was but an incidental if important, object of criticism. It was not only Southern politics that was being held up to ridicule; it was the American political and governmental system in general. Not only religious bigotry in the South, but religion and religious institutions as such. Not only the meagreness of Southern educational provisions, but the ideal of liberal education itself. Not only the shallowness of Southern achievement in literature and the arts, but the validity of the entire Western tradition of literature and the arts from Homer on down. Not only the disordered condition of agriculture and industry, then admittedly unpromising in the South, but the basic American principle of free enterprise in labor, agriculture, and industry.¹

In retrospect, Frank Owsley, too, viewed the attacks on the South as a concerted effort to discredit the South and its way of life. He read the propaganda as issuing from contrary political philosophies--the Communist and the conservative capitalist:

I was very much aware of a crusade being levelled against the South, based on poor information, or bad reporting: one of the strangest combinations in all the history of all civilizations--of the Communists and the extreme conservatives speaking the same language. I got hold of a great deal of Communist . . . propaganda. And it carried a pattern, taking advantage of all of the sectional prejudices; and it was solidly anti-Southern, solidly against the values that we all down in this part of the world had some respect for. So the neo-Confederate angle crept in there,

¹"Counterattack, 1930-1940," pp. 36-37.

because I think we all had the same feeling, that not only were we trying to reassert values that we thought were basic, but values that also had a considerable bit of a sectional nature.¹

The National Scene

Yet paradoxically, the character of their sectional defenses was, in some respects, national. When they protested against a machine civilization as a threat to the "good life" in which the arts would flourish and non-material values were to be dominant, they were expressing a view held by other writers and critics of the period who were not Southern. Fifteen years before the publication of the symposium, Van Wyck Brooks--at the outset of his career as a critic and literary historian of New England--asked:

How can one speak of progress in a people whose main object is to climb, peg by peg, up a ladder which leads to the impersonal ideal of private wealth? How can the workingman have any reality or honesty of outlook when he regards his class merely as an accidental temporary group of potential capitalists? And the university man--the man . . . who has had the fullest opportunity to seek and find a disinterested end in living, . . . what has he to actuate him but a confused and moralized instinct that somehow he must make a lot of money?²

Suspicion of mechanization was not a Southern phenomenon. In 1923 Elmer Rice's expressionistic The Adding Machine was successfully produced in New York. Various national magazines of the period published articles expressing fears that the machine would destroy the humanity of man, that it would create an automation capable of stultifying man's incentive to work while providing nothing for his leisure time. It was a theme popular in the pulpit; one minister declared, "In this age of the machine, the shadow of the Frankenstein monster . . . falls with sinister menace across the upward-reaching pathway of the race. We are all classified, standardized, regimented, while our human life and individuality are

¹Fugitives' Reunion, pp. 204-205.

²America's Coming of Age (New York, 1915), p. 176.

stifled and dwarfed."¹ Like the Fugitive-Agrarians, other critics of the American scene deplored the effects of capitalism on the state of culture. Granville Hicks, in a discussion of the relation of industry to the imagination, noted:

A study of the history of only the last half century will show how the production of more and more wealth may absorb the energies of an entire people, and the orgies of spending which have accompanied the amassing of riches are merely one more example of the way in which industry has diverted men from ancient standards and accepted occupations. . . . The task of achieving the good life has been infinitely complicated by the enormous increase in the number of "things." . . .²

And Lewis Mumford in The Golden Day traced back "the process of abstraction" to the "theology of Protestantism" and the simultaneous rise of capitalism:

All the habits that Protestantism developed, its emphasis upon industry, upon self-help, upon thrift, upon the evils of "idleness" and "pleasure," upon the worldliness and wickedness of the arts, were so many gratuitous contributions to the industrial revolution.³

The results which he observed in the 1920's were the same results the Fugitive-Agrarians were deploring:

It is no special cause for grief or wonder that the Army Intelligence tests finally rated the product of these depleted rural regions or of this standardized education, this standardized factory regime, this standardized daily routine as below the human norm in intelligence; the wonder would rather have been if any large part of the population had achieved a full human development. . . .

. . . It is not that our instrumental activities are mean: far from it: but that life is mean when it is entirely absorbed in instrumental activities. Beneath the organized vivacity of our American communities, who is not aware of a blankness, a sterility, a boredom, a despair?⁴

¹The Reverend Henry P. Frost, quoted by Stuart Chase, "Slaves of the Machine?" Harper's Monthly Magazine, CLVIII (March, 1929), 480.

²"Industry and the Imagination," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXVIII (April, 1929), 130.

³(New York, 1926), p. 33.

⁴Ibid., pp. 237-38, 281.

While not subscribing to the view that the machine and its "values" were destroying the humanity of man, Stuart Chase did reveal how widespread the criticism was before the depression:

Have you joined the Frankenstein chorus? It is quite the thing to do nowadays. From pulpit, rostrum, editorial chair, the cadence comes, in swelling volume; and the burden of the song is to the effect that man has become the slave of his machines, even as Doctor Frankenstein was overwhelmed by the monster he created.¹

But the notes of that chorus swelled after the crash made apparent that the wheels and cogs of the great economic leviathan were no longer operating efficiently and that the oil of finance capitalism was failing to flow. The melancholic note of Ralph Aiken's fearful prophecy in "More Machines--and Less Men" was not uncommonly heard: "In a world rapidly becoming wholly mechanized the worker will find it difficult to maintain his individuality and his limited outlook upon life. . . . The replacement of men by machines is not a hazy future possibility. We may consider it a coming certainty."²

In an even more specific context, the burden of the symposium belongs to the national milieu. The consequences of an unregulated machine economy, introduced into the South in the nineteenth century, became sources of serious labor dislocations after 1927. As in the 1890's, when the South--along with other sections of the nation--experienced a depression after a marked industrialization, New-South labor difficulties paralleled those which had racked the North--riots, strikes, the use of state troops, the destruction of property, murder.³ By 1927 prosperity had begun to wane in Southern industry.

¹"Slaves of the Machine?" p. 480.

²North American Review, CCXXXI (May, 1931), 397.

³C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, p. 266. Described as "a violent year in the South" as well as in the North and West, 1894 strikingly foreshadowed events which indicated serious labor problems in the region, in spite of the enticingly advertised "cheap, docile, Anglo-Saxon labor force."

The cotton mill owners instituted the Bédard efficiency system, the "stretch out," which, in effect, required that experienced workers tend many more looms for less pay. One expert worker at Gastonia, for example, reported that he had been tending forty-eight looms before the system was inaugurated, but by the time of the strike in 1929 he was watching ninety looms and earning only \$17.70 a week, \$1.30 less than he had three years before. By having two people do the work of three, one mill was able to save \$500,000 on its payroll in 1927 without cutting production.

In the spring of 1929 a wave of strikes swept through mill villages of the South. All of them were owned by Northern or foreign industrialists. At the American Glanzatoff Rayon Company in Elizabethton, Tennessee, 3500 employees struck on March 13 for higher wages; joined by 2,000 employees of the Bemberg Company, the strikers were confronted with troops of the National Guard sent in response to company appeals and sworn in as special deputies under the direction of a company-selected sheriff. Because they were forbidden to picket by the district court and arrested en masse when they attempted to do so, the strikers were doomed to defeat, even with belated union representation at the bargaining table.

What remained a threat of violence at Elizabethton became a grim reality a month later at Gastonia, North Carolina. When the strike began spontaneously on April 1, only a handful of workers were members of a union. The walk-out of 1,700 of the 2,200 employees of the Loray Mill brought Communist organizers¹ of the National Textile Workers' Union to the plant to organize the strike, but the opposition was so powerful that again the workers gained nothing. Reactions to the events pointed up the wide difference between a South accustomed to personal, individualistic, laissez-faire concepts in an economic context and a South awakening to the dangers inherent in such a point of view, especially when it prevailed in the absence of an organized or coherent means of opposition. What happened in Gastonia brought from liberal Southern and

¹ See p. 217, n. 2.

Northern journalists charges of reactionary narrowness.¹ Civil liberties of the workers were generally suspended; local police and the National Guard attempted to break the strike with blackjacks and bayonets; stories of police brutality were not uncommon--one old woman going to a store was cut with a bayonet and struck between the eyes more than twenty times; a chief of police was killed in a melee and seventy people were arrested, sixteen were indicted, and seven union leaders, including head organizer Communist Fred Beal who was absent from the scene, were convicted of second degree murder in a trial that became "an inquisition into the views of the defendants on religion, politics, and the Negro"²; a masked mob of some two hundred men, led by community political and business figures, destroyed a relief food depot; a woman striker was killed by armed men while she was riding in a truck en route to a union meeting--and no one was brought to trial although the evidence clearly pointed to one man; the National Guard assisted the company in evicting strikers from company-owned houses (it was estimated that more than a thousand people were homeless). Evidence that the workers had been unjustly treated was overwhelming; demands for a twenty-dollar-a-week wage for an eight-hour, five-day week seemed not unreasonable.

¹ Liberal Nell Battle Lewis in her column for the Raleigh News and Observer labeled the mill town "barbaric Gastonia"; Presidents W. L. Poteat of Wake Forest College and Harry W. Chase of the University of North Carolina publicly stated that the workers' civil liberties should be respected; an editorial in the New Republic for September 25, 1929, commented: "Those with a progressive philosophy can point to the attitude of the few Southern editors like George Fort Milton of the Chattanooga News, who has courageously protested against the drift of affairs." Mary Vorse, in her partisan reportorial account of what happened at Gastonia for Harper's Magazine (November, 1929), concluded: "If the Southern industrialists hold to their present policy [repression] they face a long and bloody war, bitter and costly. Sooner or later they will have to yield. Political equality cannot exist side by side with industrial feudalism." [p. 710]

²Cash, p. 355.

Nevertheless, the combination of sectional feeling against "invading" Northerners who had come down to help with the strikes, the economic and physical power of the companies, and the basic inertia of native Southern white workers who generally tended to be satisfied with the status quo and who were disinclined to organize resulted in a predictable defeat. Whatever effectiveness the strikers' defiance might have had, whatever sympathy Southerners might have felt for the workers' cause, was largely dissipated by the charges against the strikers as Communists, atheists, and seekers of racial equality.¹

Other strikes were staged in Southern mills--at Marion, North Carolina, at Danville, Virginia, at several points in South Carolina. The same pattern of suppression appeared; the same lack of success followed. At Marion, for example, twenty-one strikers were shot in the back by sheriff's deputies and six were killed while they were fleeing from tear gas. At a trial, finally brought about by government intervention, the deputies were acquitted by a jury of farmers and small tradesmen who heard appeals for leniency based on family histories and Southern tradition.²

¹ Many Southerners felt an aversion to outsiders, whether they were mill owners or labor organizers. A contributor to the New Republic, commenting on the Gastonia trial, noted: "It is undoubtedly true that the bitter resentment these defendants have aroused is greatly intensified by the fact that their leaders have come from outside." (T. S. Matthews, "Gastonia in Court," September 18, 1929, p. 120.) W. J. Cash suggested in The Mind of the South that "the identification of the movement with Communism often turned mild sympathy or apathy into angry hostility." (p. 356)

² Cash, p. 355. For further discussion of the strikes and their effects, consult Mary Vorse, "Gastonia," Harper's Magazine, CLIX (November, 1929), 700-10; William Hesseltine, The South in American History, pp. 608 ff.; "Class War in North Carolina," New Republic, LX (September 25, 1929), 137-38; Benjamin Kendrick, "A Southern Confederation of Learning and Higher Education," Southwest Review, XIX (January, 1934), 182 ff.; Cash, pp. 342-57.

Against this background, I'll Take My Stand was being planned. Whatever the personal feelings of the Agrarians on the treatment of the strikers or on the justice of their cause, this fact that chaos had erupted in the South as a result of industrial injustices offered more ammunition for their attack.

In yet another sense these Southerners were distinctively American. Seen in a wider perspective, their determination to preserve the character of the South by focusing on its distinguishing qualities was part of the regional movement then gaining momentum throughout the United States. With the poetic renaissance before World War I, it became customary to speak of Frost as a New England poet, Masters, Sandburg, and Lindsay as Mid-Westerners. In 1929 Tate, writing a critical evaluation of American poetry of the decade, noted with implied approval: that "the attempt to boom America as a unity of feeling has failed," that "the new poets are concerned with personal and local symbols, and their poetry tends towards provincialism," particularly in the South.¹ A kind of regionalism in prose was also part of the literary scene by the 1920's and early 1930's--Sinclair Lewis and his Midwestern small town culture in Main Street (1920); Ellen Glasgow and her Virginian families; Hamlin Garland and his unvarnished scenes of the Middle Border (1917-1928); and, of course, the Southern renaissance in which The Fugitive played a significant role.

By 1930 the interest in regions had developed sufficiently as a movement to acquire a label--the "new regionalism." Several little magazines, designed to promote regionalism in the arts, were focused for self-conscious attempts "to portray the all-inclusive reality of a region."² In the Great Plains region The Midland: A Magazine of the Middle West, launched in 1915 at Iowa City, continued through the 1920's to depict the land and the people of the Midwest; appearing for the first time in 1927 The Prairie Schooner, published in Lincoln,

¹"American Poetry Since 1920," p. 505.

²Hoffman, Allen, and Ulrich, The Little Magazine, p. 129.

Nebraska, offered its pages as "a medium for the publication of the finest writing in the prairie country."¹ Southwest Review (1924), representing such centers as Santa Fe and Taos as well as Texas, sought to discover and promote a regional culture; in 1929 its symposium on the problem of whether the Southwest was distinctive in its artistic expression elicited from Mary Austin, one of the leading defenders of regionalism, the observation:

There are signs that . . . we are gradually evolving a mode of musical expression which is recognizably American. Similarly, beginning among our Indian pueblos, adding steel and adapting it to urban conditions, we are creating an American architecture. In literature we are approaching forms that are natively expressive. By the time we have developed all these things to the point at which they are instinctive, and complement one another in a genetic relation to American life, we will have an American culture.²

An interest in folk culture, too, was part of the regional movement. Folk-Say, A Regional Miscellany, first issued in 1929 by the Oklahoma Folklore Society, had as its editor B. A. Botkin who explained the "new regionalism" in terms of a relation between folk-lore and literature, with the vitality of the latter coming from the oral (folk) tradition. Among the characteristics of the new regional literature Botkin named were several for which the Agrarians would have felt some affinity: (1) its historical character--it rests on retrospection; (2) a new feeling for locality; (3) its detached point of view, which offers a sensitive and critical interpretation of the local scene; (4) its realization that the American artist must take root in his native soil.³

Seen in this context, the regional character of the Agrarian rebellion against uniformity in American life is part

¹ Ibid., p. 286.

² "Regional Culture in the Southwest," Southwest Review, XIV (Summer, 1929), 476.

³ Cary McWilliams, The New Regionalism in American Literature (University of Washington Chapbooks, No. 46, 1930), pp. 17 ff.

of the national scene. The Agrarians were very much aware of attitudes developing among other critics. Davidson had saved for his file of symposium material an article by Addison Hibbard commenting on the argument that the great American novel cannot be produced because America is so diversified:

. . . so sound a thesis is it, that one is convinced that should the time ever come when American unity is so general that the novelist can write this vaunted novel, then life itself will have become so colorless, so monotonously uniform, so lifeless, that there will be nothing about which to write. The "Great American Novel" when it is written will be an epitaph of civilization, not an epitome.

"Only the return to the provinces, the small, self-contained centres of life will put the all-destroying abstraction, America, safely to rest,"² asserted Tate in 1929. This conviction--that the essential character of an artist lies in his regional roots--was to be, in part, the answer of the Agrarians to the threat of colorless homogeneity and undistinguished sameness. And it was to be justified, in their view, as an American reaction by virtue of its regional character. Davidson's perceptive essay "Regionalism and Nationalism in American Literature" makes this relationship explicit; regarding the two as supplementary aspects of the same thing, Davidson maintained that a national American literature exists through its regional character and that it consciously tends to decentralize. Hence, a regional literature may be called "a self-conscious expression of the life of a region":

It may exploit intimate and local aspects of its scene, thus recovering the "usable past" . . . but it does not narrow itself to mere picturesqueness and antiquarianism except as a reaction to an overdose of metropolitan nationalism. . . . a good regional literature needs only (to quote Allen Tate) "the immediate, organic sense of life in which a fine artist works."³

¹ "The Great American Bookshelf," Publisher's Weekly, September 29, 1928, p. 1329.

² "American Poetry since 1920," p. 508.

³ Still Rebels, Still Yankees (Baton Rouge, La., 1957), p. 71. This essay first appeared in the American Review, April, 1935.

Davidson saw regionalism, in its literary facet, as a protest--sometimes angry and intense, more often calm and assured--against "the false nationalism the metropolitans have been disseminating." Literary regionalism, he felt, was "the American means of restoring our lost balance."¹

Thus, the regional movement involved more than the aesthetic. It was, said Davidson, brought about by a "rebellion against uniformity in American life. . . .," by "the general dissatisfaction with the rule of our centralized metropolitan culture." "As a movement toward self-determination in southern letters," he added, it "may prove to be a battle for the right, . . . an exciting phase of a wholesale reanimation of American life and art around its sectional or provincial strongholds."² The issues of regionalism encompassed all facets of culture--economics, politics, religion, and social life. To the Agrarians, imbued with their region's tradition and heritage, the symposium was the natural expression of this pervading influence.

¹ Ibid., p. 276.

² Davidson, "Trend of Literature," Culture in the South, p. 210.

That "regionalism" became an important and pervasive concept in the 1930's is obvious from even a casual examination of the literature in a variety of fields: geography, sociology, city planning, and history; see, for example, Isiah Bowman, Geography in Relation to the Social Sciences (1934); Lewis Mumford's articles in the Sociological Review and The Survey Graphic; Howard Odum's Southern Regions of the United States (1936); Rupert Vance's Human Geography of the South (1932); Frederick Jackson Turner's The Significance of Sections in American History (1933).

PART II

THE BOOK AND ITS EFFECTS

CHAPTER V

THE EVOLUTION OF THE BOOK

Development of the Plan

For a brief, partisan account of how I'll Take My Stand came into being, Donald Davidson's article in the summer 1935 issue of The American Review and his 1957 Mercer University Lecture, "Counterattack, 1930-1940,"¹ are certainly informative, concise, and clear. Not only does he give proper weight to the group's loyalty to the South, intensified as a result of attacks by the Northern press and threats from New South "traitors" (the most important external factors leading to the symposium), but he summarizes briefly the process by which its character developed, discusses one of the disagreements which threatened to divide the members (there were at least four), and speaks of their public activities shortly after the publication of the book. Yet the account necessarily and understandably omits details. Although filling in and expanding will not radically change the picture, a fuller explanation--available in unpublished letters and from personal recollections of the persons involved--reveals a fascinating picture of how the interaction of basic shared assumptions, individual beliefs, and distinctive personalities resulted in a unique work.

The first suggestion for a symposium on the South may have come from Tate,² although its character as then conceived

¹This lecture was the second in a series of three and was published in Southern Writers in the Modern World, pp.31-62.

²Tate recalls some ten years after the publication of the symposium that the idea for a joint effort occurred simultaneously to him and Ransom: "And then one day--I cannot be

was quite different from the final result published as I'll Take My Stand some four years later. Early in 1926 Tate, writing from New York, had apparently suggested a joint undertaking to Davidson, for Davidson replied on March 21:

I'll write later about the symposium on Southern matters, for I can't now write fully. . . . Let me say hurriedly that I am out-and-out enthusiastic about the project. I'll join in and go the limit. Am willing to write on almost anything. The Colonial period will be the first thing I'll tackle in my projected study; but I can do the novelists, as you suggest if that is preferable. . . .

Tate must have written to Ransom, also, for a few weeks later, Ransom replying to Tate's proposal, suggested a tentative direction of thinking which the group was to take in the next four years. Indicating that he felt any symposium they might consider should be concerned with the Southern tradition rather than just an appreciative commentary on literary products and figures, Ransom wrote:

I am delighted with your idea of a book on the Old South, but have had little time to think closely upon it. Our difficulty is just this: there's so little Southern literature to point the principle. I subordinate always Art to the aesthetic of life; its function is to initiate us into the aesthetic life, it is not for us the final end. In the Old South the life aesthetic was actually realized, and there are the fewer object-lessons in its specific art. The old bird in the bluejeans sitting on the stump with the hound-dog at his feet knew this aesthetic, even. Our symposium of authors would be more concerned, seems to me, with making this principle clear than with exhibiting the Southern artists, who were frequently quite inferior to their Southern public in real aesthetic capacity. But there are performances, surely,

sure of the year, I think 1926--I wrote John Ransom a new sort of letter. I told him we must do something about Southern history and the culture of the South. John had written on the same day, the same message to me." ["The Fugitive--1922-1925 . . .," Princeton University Library Chronicle, III (April, 1942), 84.] Both John Bradbury and Mrs. Cowan believe the date was 1927, but internal evidence from the letters quoted below and Davidson's letter dated March 21, 1926, suggest that the date was 1926 and that Tate may have first broached the subject of concerted action.

to which we can point with pride, if you believe the book should be one mainly of literary criticism.¹

During the next two years the thought of constructing a united defense of an embattled, traditional South recurred to this core of the Fugitive group. That Tate was modifying his views of the character of the symposium is suggested not only implicitly by the critical articles he was writing in New York,² but also explicitly in a letter to Davidson, dated March 7, 1927:

The remarkable thing about the Fugitives, as you say, is their cohesive power. I have always thought of you, John, and myself as the Final Causes, as distinguished from the merely Efficient Cause (Dr. Mtttron-Hirsch) of the Fugitive. If there are any ideas to be formulated for the future, it lies with us to do it. What those ideas are, I have yet to see--as you already know if John has passed on my statement made recently to him. The situation implies more than the purely literary question.³

Ransom, too, thought of any project they might undertake in terms of the Fugitives as a core, to be expanded into a defense of Southern tradition; to Tate he wrote:

About our joint Southernism: Two considerations occur to me as bearing on the hopefulness of the Cause. One is yourself, and many other men who exhibit the same stubbornness of temperament and habit, men of my acquaintance born and bred in the South who go North and cannot bring themselves to surrender to an alien mode of life; this fact, many times reported within my own knowledge, argues something ineradicable in Southern culture. The other one: Croce (with one or two others) appears to have inspired a genuine and powerful revival of Italianism (in a most advanced aesthetic sense) among the younger generation of Italians. Why can't we? Look at the Vanderbilt crowd; the candidates are always there, just waiting to be shown what their cause is. The same thing in half a dozen other Southern universities. This is where ideas

¹ April 3, 13 [1926?]-as dated by Tate. Mrs. Cowan also placed this letter in a sequence of events occurring a year later, but in considering Davidson's March 21 letter, 1926 seems to me the correct date.

² See above, pp. 94 ff.

³ In Cowan, The Fugitive Group, p. 246.

are communicated, even in the midst of the general confusion, and all the better if the ideas are clear and self-sufficient.

[June 25 (1927)--dated by Allen Tate]

During the 1927-28 academic year Ransom and Davidson teaching at Vanderbilt talked informally about the book, and Tate joined them whenever he was in Nashville. The circle of interested Southerners later widened to include Frank Owsley who "brought to the conversations an enthusiasm for farming, a deep personal resentment of the contempt which non-Southerners exhibited for the South, and a vigorous encouragement of the plan to publish a book"¹; Andrew Nelson Lytle, who added "a note of remarkable bitterness over the decline of the good old ways of living,"² and in the fall Georgian John Donald Wade who had come from the staff of the Dictionary of American Biography to teach English at Vanderbilt and whose home surroundings at Marshallville "among his peach orchards, camellias, and wide plantation acres"³ identified him with a Southern agrarian way of life.

Tate's departure for France in the fall of 1928 apparently did not prevent him from making further suggestions for the symposium and the form it might take. He found an eager supporter in Andrew Lytle who wrote him early in 1929:

Your letter is just at hand, and I am so enthused about its contents that I am sitting down at once to answer it. . . . Really, the idea of the history of the South is beyond words. And just at this time, before the final concentration of the empire, it will be a crying protest against that short-sighted greed which killed the goose that laid the egg. . . . Strange to say, I've vaguely felt for some time that it ought to be done by you, but I hesitated to mention the fact, as I knew you were pretty well occupied for the time being. But with Davis to press [Jefferson Davis was published later in

¹ John Stewart, "The Fugitive-Agrarian Writers: . . ." p. 293.

² Ibid.

³ Donald Davidson, "Counterattack, 1930-1940," p. 54.

the year], your long poem completed, you can give your undivided attention to this matter. You know, I feel we ought to devote the next three or five years to a lucid and forceful re-statement of our philosophy, for when the industrial powers completely dictate, there will never again be the chance.

[January 31, 1929]

In the absence of Tate, Davidson appears to have taken the initiative to implement their proposals. Early in February he wrote Tate in France:

Ransom, Wade, and I have been trying to get up a symposium on Southern matters, but without success so far. Of the people we approached, only one, Gerald Johnson, answered, and his answer showed that he didn't understand what we were talking about. You were on our list of prospective contributors. Will you come across with something, if we revive the project?

[February 5, 1929]

Tate's answer was immediate. Writing from Paris, he commented on a variety of subjects--humanism, religion, the state of the artist, "lost causes":

There is no such thing as a lost cause. There are permanent forms of truth which, under the varying conditions of time and place, may be made pertinent. Our time and place would require the adjustment of these truths to our provincial history. The trouble is that Americans are afraid of any idea of which the immediate fruition in action is not clear. Any coherent point of view, whether [it] is to have any chance of practical success or not, becomes a valuable instrument of criticism. The chief virtue of such a stand is to make contemporary abuses stand forth for what they are. By finding good in a little of everything, as the modern liberal does, you find no good in anything. No cause is lost as long as it can sustain a few people in the formulation of truths.

[February 18, 1929]

Apparently discussions and correspondence continued through the spring and on into the summer. By July, with a month free for writing at Yaddo, Davidson reported to John Crowe Ransom a series of conversations with critic Gorham B. Munson. In his letter, Davidson returned to "our projected enterprise in the way of a partisan volume about Southern matter," enclosed for Ransom's consideration the detailed memorandum Munson had written after reading Ransom's article,

"The South Defends Its Heritage," just published in Harper's Magazine, and on the basis of Munson's enthusiastic response, reaffirmed his own faith in their Cause:

I have constantly felt, as you may remember, that our ideas had too much life in them to be merely cast upon the winds of publication in the vague hope that they might like seeds sprout somewhere; and I have always wished for the possibilities of action, believing that the time calls for a mixture of poets and philosophers in affairs. I am fully convinced that to commit ourselves to a definite "movement"--or whatever you might call it--would be the thing most worth while for all of us; it would be the greatest satisfaction to attempt . . . the nearly-impossible, and nothing less than this will avail to bring us to full artistic fruition as well as to fulfill our responsibilities (I can't help but think they are opportunities, if not responsibilities) to the younger set who are coming along, ready to be pulled in some sensible direction, and the scattered forces that might be unified.

[July 5, 1929]

To meet the challenge, Davidson was thinking of possible contributors and partisans for the movement. In his July 5 letter to Ransom, he wrote: "I am sounding out U. B. Phillips, whose book you remember I reviewed recently. He wrote me a very pleasant note. As soon as I can get to it, I want to begin definitely to round up the contributors for our collection."

Anxious to translate their long-discussed symposium into a reality, Davidson expressed the hope to Tate a few weeks later that he would return from France soon:

I need the conversations with you that you mentioned in your letter as wished-for. More especially, your services are badly needed in a big fight which I foresee in the immediate future.

It is this. For several months . . . I have been agitating the project of a collection of views on the South, not a general symposium, but a group of openly partisan documents, centralizing closely around the idea that you, Ransom, and I all seem to have in common. It would deal with phases of the situation such as the Southern tradition, politics, religion, art, etc., but always with a strong bias toward the self-determinative principle. It would be written by native Southerners of our mind--a small, coherent, highly selected group, and would be intended to come upon the scene with as much vigor as is possible--would even, may be, call for action as well as ideas.

I enclosed a prospectus of this scheme, very tentative. . . .

[July 29, 1929]

Davidson was also disturbed over a letter from Howard Mumford Jones proposing a similar scheme which he feared would undercut theirs while accenting a "progressive" note.¹ He concludes:

I'm therefore asking you . . . to write me your opinion and to indicate whether, if we should launch our own ship of ideas, you would contribute and what you would propose, in special and in general. I am much hampered by the uncertainty of my own mind, and by the lack of knowledge of possible contributors, and by a certain hesitancy on the part of Ransom, which, I fear, might be duplicated, in others. If within the next three months, there doesn't develop a clear possibility of getting the project under way, I'll prefer to drop it, for the time being.

[July 29, 1929]

However, a clear possibility of getting the project underway did develop. Perhaps Davidson's tentative prospectus served as the impetus for a fully detailed plan of procedure. To his suggestions in a letter of the 29th, Tate wrote from Paris an immediate and delighted reply on August 10, supporting Davidson in his activities on behalf of the Southern movement and indicating that he had recently written Warren proposing a tactical program. Central to Tate's thinking at that time was the formation of an academy which, he felt, ought to precede the symposium. While this suggestion was discussed through the months of planning the book, it was not acted upon because there was not enough time: the symposium, it was felt, could not wait for the formation of a Southern academy. At the Fugitive reunion in 1956 Tate recalled that he "thought of the Agrarian group as being rather like the

¹ Asked if he would contribute an essay on "New Trends in Southern Literature," Davidson wrote Jones on December 18, 1929: "As you have had intimation, I am engaged with Ransom, Tate, and others on a project somewhat in the same field as yours. We are rather closely associated in this, our hearts are set on it, and for reasons of friendship and conviction, it comes first with me. Before I could agree to appear in your volume too, I feel that I should consult with these friends to some extent. I think I owe it to them, having gone this far, to have from them some expression as to the propriety of my appearing in two different 'symposia.'"

French Encyclopedists. We issued certain ideas, reaffirmed the Southern tradition or standards."¹

Although the academy did not materialize, Tate's "slightly revised table of contents and contributors" did serve as a guide for future planning, even though not all the subjects or line-up appeared in the final symposium. In the mid-summer of 1929 the collection was envisioned as having ten articles:

Contributors and Subjects

1. The Philosophy of Provincialism--Ransom.
2. The Southern Way of Life--Perhaps Stark Young.
- . . . I suggest Red Warren.
3. Contemporary Southern Literature--Davidson, because he knows and understands it better than any of us.
4. Humanism and the Southern Tradition (This is the title I would give to your [Davidson's] Numbers 4 and 5--The Philosophy of South. Hist. and the Historically-Minded South. I would like to do this.
5. Religion and Aristocracy in the South (Your Number 6--"Protestantism in the South"). The problem here would be: Was Southern religion in accord with social and political tendencies? I can't suggest a writer for this, unless Warren does it, leaving No. 2 to Young.
6. Harper and Dew: Philosophers of the Old South. (We must revive these men. I know a good deal about them, but we should get some one else to do them up.) This essay should lead off or at least come second.
7. Politics--The article should be as you describe it. But where is the writer? W. Y. Elliott knows all about it, but he is not a separatist, . . . Very important subject.
8. Economic Issues--The contributor here stumps me too. We need a most efficient economist on our side.
9. Education. John Gould Fletcher. He is just the man. He already knows the subject.
10. Literature in the Old South. Who could do this to our satisfaction? I think the subject must be discussed.

Note: A man like Phillips, good as he is in his line, must be used only as a document: he is limited to facts, while we wish to rise upon facts to salvation. He is a fine example of the dilution we shall suffer without a definite program. The academy could use him; he would dissipate us otherwise.

The symposium should be heavily cross-referenced by footnote.

[August 10, 1929]

The planning of the symposium continued both in conversation and in correspondence through the summer and early

¹Fugitives' Reunion, p. 203.

fall. Warren returned to the States from Oxford for a summer visit and talked with some of the group.¹ In August Davidson wrote Tate, noting topics he wished to discuss; first on the list was "The Southern book--as a heading-up of ideas and as a basis of a program."² In a letter two months later he enthusiastically endorsed Tate's suggestions for the symposium:

To you goes the credit for defining sharply and ambitiously the loose aspirations that have been rattling around in our heads. It's a tremendous stimulus just to have your letter with its grand outline of activities, and though I've been a long time in answering, I want you to know that your letter shook me up from top to toe and filled me with a new fire. Ransom and I talked it over at great length, and Andrew Lytle was with us, too, I believe. You put us all in a stound, but not the kind of stound that lays people flat. Rather we were raised up--but all we seem to be able to do for the time being is talk.

[October 26, 1929]

At the same time Davidson felt doubtful that much could be accomplished in the absence of Tate, indicating that he and his associates were either too busy and distracted or not inclined to press ahead. Tate, wrote Davidson, was needed for "advice, comfort, . . . zeal [and] vision to pitch into the business wholeheartedly."

In spite of his impatience to get underway, Davidson suggested that a period of marking time might not be unwise. Labor troubles in North Carolina and other recent evidence of the inadequacies of industrialism³ would offer proof of the soundness of their arguments:

¹Interview, September 4, 1957. Warren, back at Oxford, had written to Tate in the fall of 1929, "I spent a few days in the midst of the Nashville brothers and they are on fire with crusading zeal and the determination to lynch carpet-baggers. Andrew was at Guthrie and you can imagine the ferocity with which he expresses his approbation. . . ."

²August 20, 1929.

³The "troubles" to which Davidson alluded were the strikes and violence in the textile mills of Gastonia and Marion; see pp. 214-216.

The terrific industrial "crises" now occurring almost daily in North Carolina give present point to all the line of thinking and argument that we propose to do. I don't know whether you have read of these or not. It is enough to say that hell has pretty well broken loose, and the old story of labor fights is being repeated. It all means more ammunition for us.

[October 26, 1929]

Meanwhile the time could be used for gathering more proof, for continued discussion and letter writing. "All that I see I can do at the present," declared Davidson, "is to talk, sow seed, accumulate data."

Selection of Contributors and Topics

Two major problems had to be faced before the symposium could be realized: who should write the essays and how the volume should be organized in order to present effectively their conviction that a Southern agrarian tradition was a complete way of life and should be preserved. Evidently Tate's scheme for revision prevailed in the main. The final form of the symposium was determined not only by finding informed prospective contributors who would write on the topics listed but by discovering among these, partisan Southerners who were as intensely agrarian as some of the former Fugitives. Representation of differing points of view on the South was never seriously considered. Davidson's account of the history of I'll Take My Stand indicates that the problem "finally resolved itself into . . . who could be trusted to approach the issues as we saw them."¹ The means by which the contributors were found were suggested in a letter to Tate:

I don't know how to find the men except by a process of watchful waiting and slow inquiry. We run up against, here, the lack of knowledge of our own people that is a handicap to promoting anything in the South. I know all the people we ought not to ask, but I don't know who our friends are, for they are heretics and must keep quiet, or they are sentimentalists and have been squelched. What can be done but study the situation and chew the rag cautiously until we get the right line-up. I wish you would rack your brain for suggestions. I'm willing to

¹ "I'll Take My Stand: A History," p. 313.

take almost any line-up of topics if we can only get the right people.

[October 26, 1929]

The list of possible partisans was long; from these few were called and still fewer chosen. Among those considered as possible contributors were authors, journalists, educators, clergymen, and a judge. Some were nationally known Southerners or writers on Southern problems; others were highly respected regionally: Professor William E. Dodd of the University of Chicago; Broadus Mitchell, political economist; W. W. Alexander, a clergyman; Julia Peterkin, author; G. B. Winton, clergyman and educator; Grover Cleveland Hall, editor; Louis Jaffee, editor; Finis Garrett, Congressman and U. S. judge; Chancellor James H. Kirkland of Vanderbilt; and later Gerald Johnson, journalist and author; and Stringfellow Barr, professor of history and editor.¹ Of these only Johnson and

¹This list of names appears in Davidson's account of the group; ibid. Several had received Pulitzer prizes a year or two before the planning of the symposium: Julia Peterkin was recognized with a \$1,000 award in 1928 for her novel, Scarlet Sister Mary; Grover Cleveland Hall, editor of the Montgomery Advertiser, cited for his editorials against gangism, racial and religious intolerance, and flogging, was the winner of \$500 for "the best editorial writing of 1928"; Louis Jaffee, editor of the Virginian-Pilot of Norfolk, received a similar citation in 1929; and Gerald Johnson of the Baltimore Evening Sun, author of several biographies including Andrew Jackson, an Epic in Homespun (1927) and Randolph of Roanoke--A Political Fantastic (1929). From the field of education were Broadus Mitchell, professor of political economy at Johns Hopkins and author of many articles and books on Southern industrial history, including Rise of the Cotton Mills in the South (1921), Frederick Law Olmsted, a Critic of the Old South (1924), William Gregg, Factory Master of the Old South (1928), and The Industrial Revolution in the South (with George Sinclair, 1930); and William E. Dodd, a Southerner and professor of American history at the University of Chicago, author of books on Southern leaders including the joint study Lincoln or Lee? (1928) and co-editor of Woodrow Wilson's public papers. Religion was represented by two distinguished men: G. B. Winton had been a missionary in Mexico, editor of the Christian Advocate, and was lecturer in Latin American History and Biblical Literature at Vanderbilt and author of Mexico, Past and Present (1928); W. W. Alexander was a clergyman who served as Director of the Commission in Interracial

Barr were actually approached, and both declined--Johnson with "a curt jocular quip, Mr. Barr after a friendly exchange of correspondence¹ which seemed at first to indicate his

Cooperation, a member of the committee on church and race relations of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, and in 1926 the recipient of the Harmon National Award for service in American race relations. From the field of public service Judge Finis Garrett was listed: a member of Congress from 1905 to 1929 for Tennessee, he was Associate Judge of the U. S. Court of Customs and Appeals at the time the symposium was planned (Who's Who in America, 1930-1935).

¹ Barr, who was at that time an associate professor of history at the University of Virginia and editor of the Virginia Quarterly Review after October, 1930, recalls that he was approached by Tate after Tate had read one of his essays ("The Uncultured South" in the April, 1929, issue of the Virginia Quarterly Review); the essay expressed an appreciation of certain aspects of Southern culture--a code of manners and the arts of hospitality, leisure and conversation. Asked if he would be a contributor to the symposium, Barr stated: "I found myself in this peculiar position: I was and am now an agrarian decentralist in some Chestertonian sense, but I judge my political interest was livelier than theirs. . . . After some discussion with Allen Tate I said, 'I don't think my ideas of industrialism will fit your book,' but I agreed to send an outline of them and predicted they would excommunicate me. My two-page outline of ideas led to 'Shall Slavery Come to the South?' (Virginia Quarterly Review, VI [October, 1930], 480-494.) I was right; they did excommunicate me, pleasantly but firmly." (Interview at Princeton, New Jersey, September 8, 1957.)

Between the time of the invitation and Barr's written expression of doubt, about two months elapsed. Davidson in letters to Tate through the winter expressed concern that he had not heard from Barr. Then on February 21, 1930, Davidson wrote: "He sees a troublesome division between our Southern 'programme' and our general mood. He sympathizes with both, but doubts whether he could sign the manifesto. Nevertheless, he would like to come in the backdoor as some sort of contributor, anyway, even if he isn't in full agreement with the whole prospectus. It was a very intelligent letter; . . . and I have written him a temporary reply, indicating that we have folded up the manifesto and hence still consider him one of us." Four days later Davidson reported further to Tate that he "again invited him to come in" and suggested that "we could naturally give him a fairly free hand in his own contribution." But Barr did not join the group since he felt he could not completely endorse the Manifesto.

This tenuous association was terminated by the end of September. A public letter, dated September 20, was addressed to Stringfellow Barr and signed by Tate, Ransom and Davidson. It protested against his acceptance of a controlled

adherence."¹ Of the two non-Vanderbilt contributors--"outsiders" both suggested by Tate--one was questioned by Davidson, since it was considered important by the planners that the symposium include no one who did not completely understand and share the convictions of the group. Stark Young, a distant cousin of Tate's, was enthusiastically endorsed by Davidson with one reservation²; the only objection to John Gould Fletcher was, in Davidson's opinion, that he was "too far away from the scene"--the "array . . . must be composed of people who are in the melee."³ Finally, after a discussion of various possible contributors, Davidson offered a suggestion which would insure the "deliberately partisan" nature of the volume and would exclude "sentimental conservatives whose sectionalism is of an extreme type and progressives whose liberalism is of an uplift type."⁴ He proposed:

We might seriously consider doing the "symposium" between us--you, Ransom, possibly Red Warren and Lytle, possibly S. Young. Maybe you and Ransom and I could do it.

industrialism as represented in his attack on the Southern traditionalists who refuse to cooperate with the industrialists and who avoid their social responsibility by failing to deal with a different economic order ("Shall Slavery Come to the South?"). For a fuller discussion of the article and letter, see pp. 350 ff.

¹ Donald Davidson, "I'll Take My Stand: A History," p. 314.

² "As for Stark Young, I think it would be extremely wise to have such a man as he is, if we can be sure he understands the full import of the affair and does not treat it simply as a literary or sentimental excursion. These points are in his favor: he knows the tone of Southern life at its best and writes extremely well; he comes from Mississippi originally, but has wandered widely enough not to be accused of narrow parochialism; we need at least one such eminent Southern writer, outside of our own circle, to strengthen our array, and he would put us in no danger, I think of being swallowed up by New York" (letter to Allen Tate, October 26, 1929).

³ He had been living in England for most of two decades.

⁴ "I'll Take My Stand: A History," p. 313.

There is nothing to keep us from plunging into economics and politics as we have already plunged into religion and history. If we, by ourselves, published such a book, we would then be able to find our real friends. They would surely make themselves known. And it is our great weakness now not to know who is on our side.

[October 26, 1929]

The other issue to which they gave much thought was the organization of the volume and the areas of subjects to be included. This problem was largely solved with the choice of contributors. During the early stages of planning, three points were soon settled (although the published volume showed a departure even from this decision): Ransom was to discuss the philosophy of Provincialism, Tate Humanism and the Southern Tradition, and Davidson the literature, especially the new.¹ But other areas were still to be assigned: Education, Economics, Political Theory, Religion, Aristocracy. Davidson wrote to Tate:

I am not sure that we should try to discuss Literature in the Old South at all, but am open to conviction. I know of no one who could handle this topic. Neither can I suggest anybody to discuss Religion and Aristocracy.

What we must find is an Economist and a Political thinker. Bill Elliott² won't do, no matter what his ability, for we can't entertain Caesars in this scheme. If we could find these two contributors, we could really enter the fray, for at a pinch Religion could be covered by either you or Ransom, and we would not absolutely be compelled to resurrect Harper and Dew.

.....

One thing I intend to do at once. I am going to try to find that Economist. The North Carolina situation is sure to bring him out, somewhere.

[October 26, 1929]

Two months later the field of economics was provided for; otherwise plans had not changed much. Certain fields were still uncovered, education and political theory, for instance:

¹ Donald Davidson to Allen Tate, October 26, 1929.

² Davidson refers to William Yandell Elliott, one of the original Fugitives, who was then an Associate Professor of Government at Harvard.

"We still need to find a man for politics, though I don't consider that an absolute essential, as politics is involved and can be implied or explicitly defined in various articles."¹

At the end of the year, the line-up of contributors was fairly definite. In addition to the three Fugitives who were planning the symposium, Lytle, Owsley, Lanier, Nixon, Young, Fletcher,² Warren, Wade and Kline were involved in the discussions or were being considered seriously as participants. By the spring of 1930 all of them had been approached and had accepted. Their invitations did not come, however, without some discussion, careful observation, and usually a recommendation from at least one of the three. It was apparent that Lytle was enthusiastic and devoted to the Cause. Early in the fall of 1929 he was urging Ransom and Davidson to spend a week-end and discuss the project more fully. In November he wrote Tate, "We [the Nashville group] have had one discussion, and I am going to take them to Monteagle soon to go into it more thoroughly, but we are holding up any decisive action until you and Caroline get back."³ And on the date of Tate's return to the States, January 5, 1930, Ransom sent Tate a summary of the status of the symposium, and expressed his support of Lytle:

Don, Andrew, and I have been doing recently a great deal of confabbing. By the way, Andrew has more drive and courage (of the practical kind) than any of us, and I think we would be much mistaken in leaving him out of our joint volume (supposing it is a sort of initial bow to the public) unless his offering was definitely not presentable. He has a fine thesis for his contribution, and can put it in good shape, I think. We have done a little proselyting, which does not seem immensely difficult. We will have plenty of friends. But we ought to be ourselves a group of eight or ten, so that we could dispense with the immediate friends if necessary. It is my idea that our book ought to contain that many articles, from that many charter members, so to speak.

¹ Donald Davidson to Allen Tate, December 29, 1929.

² Tate wrote Davidson on August 10, 1929: "[Fletcher] is with us--a powerful acquisition."

³ November 26, 1929.

Lyle Lanier became involved with the group through a friendship with Tate and physical proximity.¹ Davidson had been his teacher, he had had a course with Owsley, and in 1928 he returned to Vanderbilt as an assistant professor of psychology from a New York University instructorship. He, too, was corresponding with Tate in the fall of 1929 reporting that he was involved in conversations with Ransom and Davidson, and that he found Owsley (who had written a good review of Tate's Jefferson Davis for Davidson's book page) a "competent" man who "writes well," is a "good thinker," and "best of all, a Southerner."² By the end of the year Lanier³ had apparently been asked to write for the volume and was considering the scope and emphasis for his contribution--he had come to psychology by way of philosophy.

Expressing to Tate some indecision about the most effective approach to make--whether from his field of social psychology or from philosophy, Lanier considered as possibilities the specific problems: "human nature and the social order" and a general critique of philosophic thought since Darwin, which he could relate to the contrast between the industrial age and the ante-bellum South. "The crux of this attack," he felt, "would be upon Dewey's philosophy and perhaps upon the Pragmatic-Humanistic . . . movement generally." The problems he foresaw with these subjects were two: (1) with the first, he was concerned with overlapping "in idea Ransom's proposed treatise on the general philosophy of provincialism"; (2) with the analysis of philosophic thought, he would have to deal with "the lack of specific connection, on the positive side, with the old South," in order to fit his essay in with other essays on "rather specific aspects of Southern society

¹ Interview with Virginia Rock, September 26, 1957.

² November 20, 1929.

³ That the addition of Lanier was considered a happy one is suggested by Ransom's comment at the Fugitives' reunion: "We had another very powerful man here, Lyle Lanier." (Fugitives' Reunion, p. 201.)

before the war." For, despite this apparent emphasis on the ante-bellum South, Lanier noted that "When we have talked the question over I have been impressed with the contemporaneity which Don and John expected the movement to have, i.e., it would be as much an attack upon the present order as it would be an exposition of the glory of the older mode of living which it has to a great extent displaced."¹

In Herman Clarence Nixon² Davidson was convinced he had found the economist. To Tate he wrote on December 29, "The lay-out is about as it was, with the addition of Nixon. I enclose two letters from him . . . that indicate, surely, that he is our man--even if he may need a little coaching. He has not yet been definitely solicited. I am to describe the project to him this week . . . and I shall sound him out thoroughly before a final committance; it need not be final, anyhow." At a low point in the discussion of the symposium, early in 1930, Ransom found Nixon's spirited contribution the one hopeful aspect of their activity: "The one redeeming feature of last night's meeting," he reported to Tate, "was the reading of the first draft of Nixon's article, and also fiery letters from him. His article will be magnificent when it is ready finally. And he has fighting spirit."³

Young, Fletcher, Warren, Wade and Kline were approached for contributions some time early in 1930. On February 22, Ransom wrote Tate in New York: "You know Young, and you are the one to deal with him. But it is my feeling that we ought to get the benefit of his name if it doesn't sacrifice our principles--and of the beautiful English of his contribution." The others were mentioned about the same time when Ransom reported to Tate that the group had become fairly definite:

¹Letter to Allen Tate, January 25, 1930.

²Nixon had been at Vanderbilt from 1925 to 1928, when he left for Tulane, but his association with the Vanderbilt Agrarians continued.

³"Saturday the 15th"--dated by Tate as "Spring, 1930"--the month was probably February. See p. 244, n. 1 for explanation.

Here are the certainties in the way of contributions: yourself, Don, Lytle, myself, Lanier, Nixon, Barr¹; 7 there. Then let us immediately close with some other contributors from the following list: Warren (whom we are waiting to hear from), Wade, and Owsley . . . , Young . . . , and J. G. Fletcher. I think we ought to land three of them, making 10 in all, and enough for a book. . . .

Would you then undertake something like this? . . . get Fletcher at once to come in; we need him, and I think he is one of the best critical minds writing English today. . . .

["Saturday the 15th"--Spring, 1930 (February)]

In his autobiography, Life Is My Song, published in 1937, Fletcher relates how he joined the group:

In the spring of 1929, while I was in New York City. [he must have meant 1930 since Tate was still abroad in 1929], Allen Tate had approached me and had stated that the Fugitive group was now preparing for a symposium of essays, to which he invited me to become a contributor. . . . I was so thoroughly in agreement with the ideas to be mooted in the symposium in question that I instantly agreed with Tate to take part in it. In subsequent correspondence with Davidson I agreed to do an essay on education. I worked on this essay all during the late spring of 1929 [1930]; by June of that year it was in Davidson's hands.²

Warren had accepted responsibility for a contribution some time before the middle of May. Studying and writing at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar, he wrote Tate: "I've done very little on my essay yet, for the thesis is pressing me hard, but I hope to have it to Don on time. When I committed myself to the thing I did not have any idea that the publication date would be quite so soon. . . ." ³ Wade apparently had joined the group

¹ See p. 232, n. 1.

² Pp. 356-57. Evidence of Fletcher's first connection with the Fugitives is the publication in 1923 of his poem "The Last Frontier" in Volume II of The Fugitive. On a visit to Nashville in 1927, Fletcher impressed Ransom greatly who reported to Tate that Fletcher "is a very fine old-fashioned Southern aristocrat, with a mind that . . . is absolutely independent and considerably active, and a personality that is about as decent and fine as any I've met in a long time" [February 20, 1927].

³ May 19, 1930.

by February, for Ransom reported to Tate, "a critical--if not fatal meeting . . . last night: Davidson, Lytle, Lanier, Owsley, Wade (who has at last come in), and myself."¹ (A letter from another member of the group to Tate suggests that Wade had been somewhat reluctant, "fearing, perhaps, the jeers of friends about the possibility of his returning to the farm and so on."²) In a recent letter, Wade recalled the informal way he became associated with the symposium:

I don't believe I was specifically invited to contribute to I'll Take My Stand. I was teaching at Vanderbilt and I more or less grew into the project. I wrote the Cousin Lucius story under my own power, asked Davidson if he thought it appropriate for the book. . . .

Before I'll Take My Stand was published, I was often involved in discussions with many of the contributors about the implications of the book.

[Letter to Virginia Rock, July 17, 1958]

The only contributor to the symposium still to be accounted for is Henry Blue Kline. With few of his letters available from the Agrarian period, it is more difficult to determine the detail and extent to which he shared in the Agrarian philosophy at that time.³ Those of the group who knew him best were Davidson and Ransom, both of whom had been his teachers. Because he represented a later generation of students and was respected for his intellectual seriousness, his philosophical turn of mind, and his honesty,⁴ Kline was asked early in March to submit an essay for consideration. A friend of Kline's, who had worked with him in the TVA, explained the association matter-of-factly: "My general impression was that he had been a junior member of the group, had been offered an opportunity to write something for publication which naturally

¹"Saturday the 15th"--Spring, 1930 [February].

²Lyle Lanier, July 21, 1930.

³His wife, whose death came two years after his, had disposed of much of his file of material, and no reply has been received from his sister to letters of inquiry.

⁴Davidson, letter to Virginia Rock, August 25, 1959. Davidson has described him as "a recent M. A. in English . . . , a young man already mature in philosophic thought" ("Counterattack, 1930-1940," p. 55).

he seized, and that was that."¹ A friend of college days, now Dean of the Graduate School of Public Administration at Harvard University, suggested, "Hank Kline was picked up as the youngest member of the group to contribute to the symposium. I think his elders wanted to display him as a refugee and a convert from a Northern school of technology [he had been a student at the Case Institute of Technology for two years] who had been won over to an esthetic view of life and redeemed for the Southern tradition."² On March 13, in a long letter commenting on the Articles drawn up as a draft for the Manifesto, Kline wrote to Davidson:

I am exceedingly pleased at the invitation to submit an essay for the book. I had been contemplating something on similar lines anyhow; and now I'll be glad to work it out and give you the opportunity to see if it fits your needs. It will be not only a statement of my attitude, but also of how I came to reach that attitude, which seems to me much more important.

Concurrent with the discussions about possible and acceptable contributors, the specific content of the book was still being considered through early spring. Ransom reported to Tate in New York:

On the matter of subjects for articles. Several more were developed last night, in addition to the standing untaken ones of Education, and Religion, and Race in the South. We need an essay defining an agrarian society, in terms of economic distinctions; and indicating the place in it of cities, professions, and industries. Also one on the place of woman in an agrarian society. There isn't a doubt that the women have revolted from the farm and that the old-fashioned farm wasn't meant for them, and the new agrarianism must be improved for their benefit; otherwise the women are invariably our enemies, . . . Another article of great value would be a simple but full one on how the actual countryman's life ought to be made livable again; Andrew knows all about that, and it is just possible

¹Paul T. David, Director of Governmental Studies, The Brookings Institution, letter to Virginia Rock, June 8, 1956.

²Don K. Price, letter to Virginia Rock, August 7, 1957. Davidson does not endorse this interpretation.

that is his true article; he sees that the farmer now lives out of a paper sack, and that farms are getting industrialized just like factories, etc., etc.¹

From the series of events and correspondence just summarized, the character of the group, the reason for and the nature of its cohesiveness emerge clearly. There was no formal organization, only informal conversations, no single appointed head but a remarkable interaction of personalities and ideas which sparked and coalesced into I'll Take My Stand. Undoubtedly, the Fugitive experience of the central triumvirate--Tate, Ransom, and Davidson--and their close personal friendship provided the core around which men with like minds rallied, men who had convictions about the value of an agrarian way of life. The fact that Tate was away from Nashville through most of the discussion and detailed planning in no significant way hampered the symposium. In certain respects his absence may have served to unify the group. Because he was not on the scene, he made suggestions for the symposium, sometimes to several men. To Tate most of the contributors wrote offering ideas on what to do about the South, discussing issues as they developed, planning their strategy as Agrarians. Ransom, Davidson, Lytle, Lanier--in their enthusiasm for Tate's suggestions, in their expressed wishes for his presence in Nashville--seem implicitly to consider him at that time as the fulcrum of the symposium.² In July, 1929, Davidson, after

¹"Saturday the 15th"--[February, 1930]. Except for the article on the place of women in the agrarian society, which never materialized, all of the others appeared in the volume: Fletcher wrote on education, Tate on religion, Warren on race in the South, and Lytle on the yeoman farmer's life and the threat of mechanization.

²Tate recently has called Davidson "the leader of the Southern 'Agrarians.'" ("Notes on American Poets," Modern Verse in English, 1900-1950, eds. David Cecil and Allen Tate [New York, 1958], p. 649.) Davidson did most of the necessary corresponding about the contributions and in consultation with other members of the group on the scene, edited the manuscripts. "Without his devotion and determination the symposium could not have been organized," Tate wrote. (Letter to Virginia Rock, October 2, 1959.)

writing Tate of his hesitancies and uncertainties about the symposium, concluded: "But I'd like to make a fight, and I'd like to have your advice and help. In fact, if you were on the ground, I'd propose that you should be editor of the project. . . ." ¹

Editorial Problems

But there was no editor; the project was a group undertaking. It was the absence of an editor which helps partially to explain the reasons for the development of certain problems and the manner in which they were solved during the six months before publication of the symposium. Five issues emerged: negotiations for a publisher, agreement on the joint Manifesto, meeting a deadline for a fall publication date, the choice of title, and the suitability of Warren's essay dealing with the question of race.

The first discussion about publication apparently was begun between Davidson and the Macmillan Company as early as September, 1928, more than two years before the volume appeared. By mid-February, 1930, negotiations were underway with two publishers, Macmillan and Harper's. Davidson had been writing Lewis Titterton, associate editor of Macmillan, while Tate had been in touch with Eugene Saxton of Harper's. Letters from the two companies offering contract terms were in the hands of the group within the same week, Harper's arriving before February 18 and Macmillan's on February 21. In the meantime, Ransom had asked Tate to commit the group to a publisher:

Would you undertake something like this? . . . see if a publisher is willing to close with us on some such terms as this: A symposium by 8 or 10 men, for fall publication, if the manuscript must be submitted by April 30; or a symposium by 10 or 12 men if it may be submitted as late as July 1 or 15. Of course, for the present, we can not quite name the contributors; but I think we could do so in three weeks time. Once the trade was completed there would be no backing out, and everybody would fall to. . . . [Ransom mentioned as possibilities Coward-McCann;

¹ July 29, 1929.

Harper's, Tate's suggestion; Macmillan, Davidson's; and Doubleday-Doran.] If these moves meet with your approval and if you feel that you have enough assurance on our part to enable you to approach publishers, I hope you will do it.¹

The official group authorization, conveyed by Ransom to Tate,² came February 25.

The confusion came about quite naturally, and Davidson's explanation to the Macmillan representative, L. H. Titterton, points up clearly the uniqueness of the volume and indeed of the whole group:

When I first began to communicate with you on the subject of this book, I could speak to a large extent both for myself and for the book, without any violation of the proprieties: for during a great part of this time only three people were interested--Ransom, Tate, and I--and of the three perhaps up to a certain point I took the greatest interest. But since this early stage the project has gone through a series of changes. It is now more distinctly a group project. As you know, at a recent meeting we decided to ask Tate, since he was already in New York, to act as our representative in negotiating a contract; and it was only at that same time and in connection with that decision that our plans for publication became definite.

[February 25, 1930]

The contract, with terms Davidson considered "excellent,"³ was signed with Harper's, and an October 15 publication date was set.⁴ At the same time Davidson wrote Tate expressing the

¹"Saturday, the 15th"--dated by Tate as Spring, 1930. The month must have been February, not March (which also had a Saturday the 15th), considering the exchange of letters between Davidson and Tate, and Davidson and Titterton, all dated February.

²Lytle recalls that when Tate's wire from New York came asking what he should do in regard to a contract, he, Ransom, and Davidson talked the matter over and that "Ransom and I . . . took the responsibility to wire Allen to go ahead." (Letter to Virginia Rock, September 1, 1959.)

³The contract proposal from Eugene Saxton of Harper's provided an advance payment of \$300, a 10 per cent royalty to 2,500 copies, 12 1/2 per cent to 5,000, and 15 per cent thereafter (Donald Davidson to Allen Tate, February 18, 1930).

⁴Recently Davidson wrote of the contract negotiations, "As soon as he returned to the United States, Allen Tate, by

wish that someone be appointed as editor to get the book done in time and done properly, "someone to act as a clearing house and prodder so that things will not get mixed up."¹ Apparently Davidson served in this capacity through the spring and summer, for essays were sent to him by Fletcher, Warren, Nixon and Kline.

The problem of creating a coherent book, reflecting a consistent philosophy about the South without duplications or omissions also concerned the group. The solution was representative not only of the dual, paradoxical character of the problem but also, again, of the singularity of the group. Their concern for the unity and logical structure of the book is evident in the letters exchanged among Tate, Davidson, Ransom, and Lanier. By January, 1930, when the group was seriously discussing topics and possible contributors, Lanier, for instance, expressed a fear about weaknesses inherent in an unplanned volume; writing to Tate in New York, he observed:

You have heard, I suppose, of the recent developments in the way of plans for the consummation of the Southern Renaissance (at least it is to be hoped that this appellation is prognostic). I am very enthusiastic over the prospects, although I am in favor of a more careful organization of the book, as to internal coherence in the way of sequence of subjects treated than the present tentative list of topics seems to possess. Perhaps I am wrong in this judgment, but I think that we should be overly cautious not to spoil or diminish the effectiveness of the volume by a lack of integration or by omission of important topics. Overlapping can be reduced to a minimum by having each contributor prepare an abstract, copies of which will be sent to all others.

[January 25, 1930]

Suggestions which were to avoid such dangers have already been noted: a topical organization of discrete areas, a choice of contributors who would be not only well-informed

an extraordinary stroke of persuasion, extracted from Harper and Brothers . . . a signed contract for the publication of our book, not one line of which had yet been written" ("Counterattack, 1930-1940," p. 57).

¹ February 25, 1930.

on their particular topic, but just as important, in sympathy with the Southern agrarian philosophy. Yet the most distinctive element of the symposium, the characteristic that makes it different from all other collective expressions about the South, is the Manifesto, an introductory philosophical statement subscribed to by all the contributors. This creed was to solve two problems: it was intended to insure a unified point of view by guiding any of the contributors to the philosophy formulated by Davidson, Ransom and Tate, and it was to be a propagandistic declaration of faith, to rally Southerners in particular and other regional advocates of an agrarian mode of living to their intellectual, aesthetic, and socio-economic cause. More than a year before the publication of the symposium (in the summer of 1929) Tate proposed to Davidson that a "philosophical constitution" be drawn up, setting forth their social, literary, economic, religious, and philosophical ideas; such a statement, he felt, would inevitably draw upon their heritage but they should view it "not in what it actually performed, but in its possible perfection." Thus, Tate believed, they "would crystallize into opposition or complete allegiance the vaguely pro-Southern opinion of the time."¹ Some months later Davidson wrote to Tate:

To the end of clarifying "objectives" (great word!) Ransom, Lytle, and I are working on a sort of Credo or Manifesto, which will serve to acquaint contributors with our aims and to furnish a definite line for articles to follow. . . . This Credo, in its final form, can be used as a foreword to the volume; and I have suggested that we also have a final summary, at the end of the book, in which the various articles are reviewed and applied to the general purpose--this will be a wonderful help to future reviewers, of course!

[December 29, 1929]

Less than a week later, Ransom was also writing Tate on the same matter, suggesting practical as well as more philosophical values:

. . . how to make sure that so many writers are properly indoctrinated. Here is a chance to kill three or four

¹ August 10, 1929.

distinct birds at one throw. You long ago proposed that we issue a manifesto. Suppose that we don't wait for the doctrines to ripen fully, but go on record now with them. In other words, put it into the book as our tentative Articles of Faith. It might have these advantages: (1) It would give all the writers something to look at in shaping their contributions, and increase the unity and force of the book as a whole; (2) It would (even before (1) serve as a test of faith for the writers, and start us all out committed equally to a Cause; (3) It might be used independently of the book to this extent:--Suppose the book is for early fall; then in late spring wouldn't the New Republic print the manifesto,¹ if worded generally enough to be intelligible by itself; which would put a little money in the war chest and serve as a preliminary ad. for the book.

[January 5, 1930]

Apparently Tate concurred with Ransom, for on February 9 he was writing Davidson:

There are two reasons why it might be desirable to get the Manifesto in print as early this spring as possible. (1) We ought to have a publisher definitely committed before we write the book; there's little doubt we will get it placed, but we can't afford the risk. The Manifesto will be advanced publicity, not of the kind to seal the book but the kind to convince the publisher of the desirability of taking it: the Manifesto will be discussed and attacked, and this will convince the publisher that the symposium would receive the same attention. (2) The Humanist symposium is out and because we raise the same issues in another form we must profit by their furore [sic], at least with the Manifesto, since we can't with our book.

Yet, deciding that a manifesto was the means by which to present a united front against materialistic forces and producing such a document to which twelve men of integrity and independence could subscribe was an exceedingly difficult task and proved temporarily to be a cause for despair that the project could be successfully completed. The plan for creating such a joint statement was practicable: each was to write his own manifesto individually, and then they were to meet as a group to combine their versions into one statement. Davidson

¹ As a result of editorial difficulties in producing the Manifesto, this suggestion for prior publication was not followed.

suggested to Tate that he too might like to contribute, or else to make extensive revisions in whatever the group produced. But there were difficulties inherent in even so well conceived a procedure. Ransom suggested their source:

Don and Andrew and I agreed to write separate manifestoes for comparison. Up to date, I seem to be the only one who has finished one; and mine doesn't quite suit me yet. . . . Don and Andrew agree to all my doctrines, but there may be issues of expediency to consider. There are some hard strategic questions to answer. It is probably my tendency, and probably yours also, to be rather abstract and philosophical about such matters, and that might be easily overdone.

[January 5, 1930]

Within the next month unsuccessful attempts were made to create the Manifesto. Several versions were circulated. One from Ransom¹ was sent to Tate and to Kline by March, for Tate proposed the addition of several articles, and Kline commented extensively on both in a letter of March 13. Both Ransom and Davidson were dissatisfied and despaired not only over what had been written, but over what is always a danger in any group activity--that group commitments may not always take precedence over individual obligations and that a general philosophy, however empathetically shared, does not insure unanimity on specific details. Reporting to Tate the outcome of a meeting to put the Manifesto in shape for publication, Ransom wrote: "With every discussion this work becomes more formidable and its dimensions increase." The Manifesto, he said, was "too bulky and too difficult and too various in its topics. . . . the chief of its faults: it is rather too dogmatic, and not sufficiently tentative in its tone; not that exactly, but brash, personal. . . ." The result was an agreement that they needed to give it more attention and work, to delay, and--

. . . to decide that we had just as well wait on the Symposium in general. That is, our ideas might clarify better in time; and besides, once we had got to that point, it seemed that everybody wanted to wait anyway on the score of

¹See Appendix A, "Articles of an Agrarian Reform."

urgent previous commitments¹ that would make it hard to get articles done in time for fall publication. . . leaving me as the only single one that did not want more time. So it was decided almost unanimously, though without any formal vote, to aim at publication in 1931 and abandon the project for the moment. I offered no opposition; I was dumbfounded. . . .

[Saturday the 15th (February, 1930)]

At this point Ransom was considering whether to abandon the symposium, almost convinced that individual activity was the only way to accomplish anything:

I am going to try to make the crowd reconsider, and I believe Don wants that too. My position is that we are beginning a campaign, not a battle, and we are taking this opening battle far too seriously. I have never in my life been more deeply impressed with the dilatoriness and indecision of the academic mind. . . . I feel like giving up the group idea entirely and going it alone if our project--such an easy one, and under discussion now for some two years--is to fall through like this. I also feel that we have been betraying you and Nixon and Warren in trying to interest you in such a group. . . .²

Then Ransom shifted from negative criticism to positive suggestions. After asking Tate to seek an offer from a publisher and indicating a desire to issue the book with whatever essays were available, even if they had to leave out some of their most promising contributors, he returned to the problem of the Manifesto and considered another possibility:

Let us recast the Symposium as a statement of principles, rather miscellaneous but more full and leisurely than in their present form, and get the signatures of all, even the non-contributors, to it. . . . For the immediate

¹ Five of the six (Ransom, Wade, Owsley, Lanier and Davidson) were busy at the time with teaching in addition to other projects. Ransom was engaged in writing God Without Thunder, Wade in preparing John Wesley; Owsley, King Cotton Diplomacy; Lytle was completing research for and was working on Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company while farming in Alabama; Lanier was involved in research in the areas of race, experimental and physiological psychology; and Davidson was editing and writing for the book page in the Nashville Tennessean.

² "Saturday, the 15th" (February, 1930); this was a second letter written later on the same day as the one quoted above.

present we might waive the idea of printing the Articles separately, and come back to it for decision a little later. I think this general scheme will be agreed to, as the brethren are very amiable, just lackadaisical.¹

Postscripts to this letter added after the meeting that day have a more optimistic tone, however:

The meeting was a great success--the brethren once more in line-- . . . now it seems that Wade and Owsley can do us articles within two or three months anyway, by a great effort--I really think we are saved.

We can safely leave the composition of the articles to the brethren, I think. If there develops a piece of duplication we can consult and edit them; it isn't likely, I believe. Your idea of cross-references and Don's of an editorial resumé [are] both mighty fine, especially yours. Let's put confidence in our men and turn them loose. This is probably necessary in view of shortness of time.

Two days later Davidson reported to Tate about the meeting and the sources of disagreement on the Manifesto. On the basis of his letter the inference is not unwarranted that the very literateness of the group, as well as the intensity of their convictions based on personal experiences and their individual interests and temperaments, contributed to their initial inability to agree on a joint statement:

After the discussion here, at which six were present (Lytle, Ransom, Owsley, Wade, Lanier, and I) it seemed almost hopeless to get the Articles into a final presentable shape at once; the more we work with them, the more complicated the problem becomes. And to pull and haul at

¹Ibid. This suggestion seems to have been accepted, judging from the published character of the Manifesto, entitled "Statement of Principles." See Appendix A.

Kline, too, was unhappy with the original form of the Manifesto. Writing Davidson on March 13, he asked, "since they are not entirely distinct and separate credos, why not form them into a single 'philosophy', which in fact they are, rather than into a 'theology', which, if I do not misunderstand very badly, they are not? . . . so I repeat that I would whip the articles into some sort of shape to read as straight exposition; in the form of an Introduction, perhaps. If the bang-bang effect of a Credo or Decalogue is wanted, a short "list of articles" could be put in too. If this is done, the Articles should be cut down to the most general terms, and should be no longer than a very few lines each."

them indefinitely would be to sacrifice our real project, which is to get a book ready. I think it would be wholly wise to wait on the Articles until we have a book ready, or nearly so. Then we can shape them for separate publication, if it seems wise to do so, revising them in the light of the chapters of the book itself, and even in that case we can use them as a joint, signed statement, publishable by itself. You cannot imagine what difficulties attend phrasing, scope, etc.; we keep running into new views, obstacles, ideas, and have just about concluded that what we intended at first as a scheme for practical information of contributors has developed into an endless debate, and amounts to putting the cart before the horse.

[February 17, 1930]

Yet, the Manifesto was issued: written by Ransom and revised to some extent by other members of the group,¹ it presented briefly the common convictions which all the contributors professed. In view of the difficulties inherent in the very nature of the project, this was a remarkable, yet not an inexplicable accomplishment: "It was through the good fortune of some deeper agreement that the book was expected to achieve its unity." For this agreement was in part the result of their being Southerners, "well acquainted with one another and of similar tastes,"² entertaining many convictions in common and sharing many intellectual experiences.

Nevertheless, they did not share all convictions, their minds were not facsimiles, nor did they agree precisely on how their attitude toward the South should be represented. Nowhere is this independence more unmistakably revealed than in the difference of opinion over the title of the volume. I'll

¹ Davidson's account of the "Statement of Principles" points out that it was drawn up for the sake of unity, that it had been revised several times on the basis of suggestions from nearly all contributors, and that except for some passages and sentences here and there, the actual phrasing was Ransom's. One last-minute change in the wording (indicating their concern that the past was to be seen in continuity with the present) was noted in Davidson's article: "That idea [an independent political destiny for the South] was finished in 1865" became "that idea is thought to have been finished in 1865" ("I'll Take My Stand: A History," p. 314).

² "Introduction," I'll Take My Stand, p. ix.

Take My Stand, taken from the song "Dixie" ("in Dixieland I'll take my stand, to live and die for Dixie") was first suggested some time before the end of March by John Wade. Like many of the ideas for the symposium, this one emerged in a conversation; Wade recalled: "Donald Davidson and I were talking, I believe. Talking, talking, talking. Possibly each of us suggested a dozen titles. When I said, 'I'll Take My Stand,' he said he thought that would do."¹ But this title even with its more factual addition--"The South and the Agrarian Tradition"--did not satisfy several of the group, and a heated editorial debate later ensued; Tate, Warren, Lytle, and Lanier wanted a change, and Nixon and Kline also were not completely satisfied with the "Dixie" title. "Tracts Against Communism" was suggested. But Davidson and Ransom finally opposed this alternative for several reasons. (Wade does not recall being involved in any ardent and extended discussion on the proposed change in title.²)

The discussion and letters exchanged through the late spring and summer months of 1930 reveal that entitling the volume became an issue not primarily because of its "appeal" (or lack of appeal) to prospective readers but because of its philosophical and emotional implications. In May, Warren wrote Tate from England, expressing his reaction to the choice: "I think the title . . . is the god-damnedest thing I ever heard of; for the love of God block it if you can. [They] must be idiot[s] . . . if they submit to it."³ In the absence of a written, chronological account of what happened, the following reconstruction is based on letters to Tate (who assigned dates to several of these many years later). Some time during the late spring or early summer Davidson and Lytle visited Tate at Benfolly, his farm near Clarksville. On this visit

¹Letter to Virginia Rock, July 17, 1958.

²"That title ['Tracts Against Communism'] was considered out of my presence . . . or I may have forgotten" (*ibid.*).

³May 19, 1930.

the title was discussed and the prologue was re-written "to take care of the attack on Communism." Davidson was asked to write Ransom and inform him of Tate and Lytle's dislike of "I'll Take My Stand" and to indicate their preference. This Davidson did, but, according to Lytle, he did not make clear that they wished to change the title unless Ransom had "violent objections." Davidson "merely told him [Ransom] that Tracts Against Communism had been suggested along with many others, to which he replied that he preferred the I'll Take My Stand. That is, Don left the impression that it was just another title. This, of course," continued Lytle, "was not a deliberate attempt to table the matter" Davidson explained that he had felt "the Clarksville discussion was no more than that and had not brought anything to an issue."¹

Apparently no action was taken during the summer although letters discussing the issue had been exchanged. Writing to Davidson in regard to his own essay on Southern economics, Nixon remarked that "the suggested title is attractive" and then offered for consideration of its appropriateness:

The Promise of Southern Life (cf. Herbert Croly's The Promise of American Life), though that title might not have the sentimental appeal of I'll Take My Stand and might not fit the other essays as well as I think it fits mine. Would it be going too far to follow with the comment, "A Collection of Essays by a Group of Rebels of the Third Generation"?

[March 22, 1930]

Henry Blue Kline, not realizing that a title had tentatively been selected, wrote Davidson June 2, suggesting, "No 'Progress'," "No 'Progress' Here!," "A Stand in Dixie," "'Progress' Not Wanted." "The first and fourth of the list are best, I think." On being informed what title had been under consideration, Kline responded diplomatically but frankly:

¹ Letter from Andrew Lytle to Allen Tate, dated by Tate Spring 1930. However, internal evidence would suggest a later date, some time after September 5, since there are references in this letter to a joint letter written by Davidson and Ransom to Tate and Lytle, dated September 5.

My first reaction to "I'll Take My Stand" was unfavorable--but I'm afraid I like it better after racking my brain to try to think up a better one. It's a hard job, titling a Symposium, isn't it--that is, without falling into excessive formality? My feeling is that "I'll Take My Stand" is a little esoteric for the average reader; nor am I sure even that many good, intelligent Southerners would place it at once in its "Dixie context--so goodness knows what a professional damyankee critic, unfamiliar with the words of the song, would make of it.

[June 16, 1930]

Other minor objections were listed by Kline--his dislike of titles with the first person personal pronoun, the length of the full title (when the subtitle was added), and its sentimentality. His own suggestion, though apparently not widely discussed, was interesting. Going to Ransom's "Antique Harvesters," Kline wrote, that he found the phrase, "Resume, harvesters,"

. . . which seems to me, when used with the subtitle, "The South and the Agrarian Tradition" to fill the bill. . . . The word "harvesters" is full of honest sentiment and rich in connotations bearing directly on the subject and purpose of the papers; and it is broad enough to embrace them all. And "resume" is perfection: "Awake, Harvesters" is much poorer by comparison; "resume" gets over the idea that the harvest is there for those who will glean it; then, by implication, precisely what the contributors intend to do is to glean and to encourage others to glean it.

[June 16, 1930]

To meet the objection that his suggestion could be called equally esoteric, Kline proposed (if Ransom would approve) printing certain lines from the poem as an epigraph.¹

¹The lines from "Antique Harvesters," which Kline wished to use as the epigraph were the following:

/Trust not but the old endure, and shall be older
/Than the scornful beholder.

.

Resume, harvesters. The treasure is full bronze
Which you will garner for the Lady, and the moon
Could tinge it no yellower than does this noon;
/But grey will quench it shortly--the field, men, stones.
/Pluck fast, dreamers; prove as you rumble slowly
/Not less than men, not wholly.

Bare the arm, dainty youths, bend the knees
Under bronze burdens. And by an autumn tone

"Resume, Harvesters [which he thought "good" and "pertinent"], marks the volume (by poetical inference . . .) for just what it is--a definition of and appeal to what is best in the Antebellum tradition."

But the title most fully discussed was Tracts Against Communism. Lytle wrote Tate, "I am rather sorry that you did not take up with Harper the change of title."¹ Lanier, in commenting on the situation, places some of the blame on their own inertia.² In July Davidson expressed his divided feeling about the matter, suggesting that Tate see Saxton of Harper's to find out if a change was still feasible, although he himself was inclined to let the title stand:

So far as I am personally concerned, and I think Ransom feels the same way, I'd be quite content to have you title the book; and I don't think any other contributor would raise any substantial objection. Why not, then, just go ahead and fix the damned thing?

. . . I'm sorry--profoundly sorry, in view of your expressed feelings--that nothing was done. Why, if you had said, in the early stages, or even later, as you say now: I don't like it,--it gives me the creeps; then there would have been no debate. The title would have been dropped.--But this situation, of course, is the inevitable result of having many heads, not one. . . .

Personally, I have felt now and then some mental disturbance about the title. When I visited you, you know I was quite ready to change if it seemed best. But I have

As by a grey, as by a green, you will have known
Your famous Lady's image; for so have these;
And if one say that easily will your hands
More prosper in other lands,

Angry as wasp-music be your cry then:
"Forsake the Proud Lady, of the heart of fire,
The look of snow, to the praise of a dwindled choir,
Song of degenerate specters that were men?
The sons of the fathers shall keep her, worthy of
What we have done in love."

Kline added as a suggestion: "The epigraph can be shortened by the omission of the verses marked /."

¹ Dated by Allen Tate, June, 1930.

² Letter to Allen Tate, July 21, 1930.

felt the same mental disturbance about other titles at other times. . . . However, I don't feel it matters greatly. No title, however bad or good, can really hurt or help our book very much. . . .

Ransom still thinks the present title a pretty good one,* but doesn't mind changing at all. We both feel that it is absolutely due you to fix whatever can be fixed and would never in the world insist on keeping something that offended you.

[Saturday, July --, 1930]

In the margin (at the point in the letter marked with an asterisk) Davidson added: "If it were left to a vote, I should favor the present title rather than any other one so far suggested. Honestly, it doesn't affect me as it affects you. And it strikes me as simply funny that we who have agreed so thoroughly on all our great principles, should disagree on such a thing as the title!!!" (On July 21 Davidson in reporting to Tate that the Harper's Southern agent had been in Nashville with a "dignified and attractive" dummy of the book, added that the "Harper people are quite taken with the present title," that it was listed in the catalogue, and orders were being taken.) Lanier and Cwsley, he reported, seemed inclined to withdraw their objections to the title after seeing how it "sets up." "It seems to me," Davidson observed, "that unless we can propose something mighty good,--and definitely better and more advisable in every way--and propose it quickly, there will not be much reason for revising the title and not much chance to do so unless somebody gets busy and pushes matters."

So disturbed was Tate over this issue that he apparently considered withdrawing from the symposium altogether, but by mid-July he had decided to continue his support and to request the addition of a footnote to indicate his and others' disapproval of the choice of title. Lanier, writing Tate July 21, supported him:

I was glad to get your letter and to learn that you have decided to contribute to the book--despite the poor title. . . . I thought it could be changed more easily than seems to be the case or I should have raised more 'cain' about it, for I feel about it just as you do, I think. . . . let me assure you of one vote on your request

as to inserting a footnote about the title.¹ I should even like to propose that a general note be inserted somewhere at the front to the effect that certain deficiencies in the title are recognized by several contributors, that it tends to misrepresent the spirit of the volume both in its allusion to the Civil War setting and in the implied nature of the motivation of the authors--and so on. Do you think this would be proper?

No vote, apparently, was taken, although Lanier suggested a procedure to adopt had it been necessary: "I believe . . . that we could get enough numerical support to secure such an action [a dissenting footnote], by actually circulating a petition in order to get a vote. There's Red, Andrew, you and I, at least, and there would probably be others."² The footnote was the compromise effected, when belated attempts to make a change were unsuccessful.

The major objections to the title were broadly philosophical in character, although Lytle saw some practical advantages in Tate's proposal: "I liked the tactical import of Tracts Against Communism; the selling value; and the added surprise which the contents would give the reader, expecting a discussion of the Reds and the activities of New York's idle who form the bulk of the supposed Communistic party in this country."³ More important in their thinking, however, were their philosophical objections to the title's implications. They asserted that the intentions of the volume, as they understood them, were misrepresented by the title. It appealed to a love of the past; it emphasized the distinctiveness or exclusiveness of the region and its problems rather than its representativeness or inclusiveness; it sought to enlist

¹ A few weeks later Lanier stated even more explicitly his willingness to support Tate's position: "I don't know that it is necessary for me to vote formally on the proposed footnote to your essay. If so, my vote is: Put in any damned thing about the title you see fit; you can't possibly say too much about it" [Letter to Allen Tate, August 1, 1930].

² Letter to Allen Tate, July 21, 1930.

³ Letter to Allen Tate, June, 1930, dated by Allen Tate.

supporters on emotional rather than rational grounds. Lanier summarized his objections in a succinct statement:

It's a false title because our book is proposed as a rational treatment of historical and contemporary conditions, not as a pseudo-emotional appeal to vague prejudice. The thing sort of makes my ears burn when I think of it--somewhat as I imagine I'd feel if I were caught by a respected confrère on a "booster" trip or at a Rotary club meeting.

[Letter to Allen Tate, July 21, 1930]

On September 3 Tate addressed a letter to E. F. Saxton of Harper's and sent a carbon copy to Donald Davidson to see if the title might be changed. In it he explained how "I'll Take My Stand" became the title and summarized the reasons for their strong dissatisfaction with it. The choice came about by accident, he asserted, and had not been discussed thoroughly by the group who had been scattered through the summer. Their objections centered on the title's misrepresentation of their aims, on its emotional connotations which "few of us like," and on its failure to "make clear what we stand on or against": "If the Southern tradition stands for anything valuable, that value is also universal. 'I'll Take My Stand' implied the mere fact of exclusiveness, but falsified the social and moral benefits of it." He then gave the advantages of "Tracts Against Communism," which, he believed, "gets nearer our intentions:

First, it implies the idea at the root of our position: we are opposed to all economic and social organization that imperils individualism, and we are thus opposed to industrialism for the same reason as we are against Communism; they tend to the same social values. Secondly, this title is just paradoxical enough to attract attention; it will at least startle the ordinary reader who might be inclined to call us "radical" by charging him with ultimate "radicalism" if he continues to support the industrial system.

When Tate sent a carbon copy of this letter to Davidson, he asked that a vote be taken on a title change and recorded three votes in favor--Warren's, Lytle's and his own. Immediate replies, both individually and jointly, came from Davidson and Ransom. They were appalled at the proposal to

change the title at so late a date (the scheduled publication date of October 15 was apparently already to be delayed). In a personal letter to Tate Davidson wrote:

You spoke of having the horrors. Well, after sweating over this book for the past six months, I am exposed to nothing short of delirium tremens when faced with the prospect of a democratic majority coolly voting, at the last moment, to argue with the publisher about a change of title--as if that were quite easily done.

[September 5, 1930]

In a joint statement sent to the whole group, Ransom and Davidson gave two reasons for not changing the title. The first was practical, based on appeals to their sense of propriety: the publishers had advertised the book under the given title "in the innocent presumption that a group of Southern gentlemen would not embarrass them at a late moment by changing their minds," and in addition the book had already become locally known as I'll Take My Stand, had had four notices in newspapers, and since its appearance was already delayed because of their own remissness, "it is not highly becoming to raise further difficulties." The second group of reasons was focused on philosophical considerations:

We favor the title on its merits. To us it does not connote the same ideas that it does to you. It means: "A statement of convictions by Southerners; take them or leave them; specifically, we unite Southernism with agrarianism, on grounds both historical and philosophical." We are not startled by the consideration that the phrase is lifted from a song named "Dixie," and that in its immediate context appears the expression, "to live and die for Dixie." The full title is: "I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition." Observe that the colon is one of the subtler marks of syntax that could not possibly occur to a frenzied and uncritical patriot--there is infinite protection for us in that colon. . . . the song Dixie is not so disreputable as you suppose. . . . The title-phrase is strong, clear, homely, and mostly Anglo-Saxon from the point of view of language; and historically it is apt.

Referring to the argument in Paragraph 2 of your proposed letter, "If the Southern tradition stands for anything valuable, that value is also universal". Do you mean that you want nothing local in your title? You still have it in the title of your proposing; you have it plentifully in the book at large. Or do you mean that you want

the universal ground of the local to stand immediately beside it? You have it under the old title: "the Agrarian Tradition." As for exclusiveness, any historic principle that has been fought for will have that; we mean to be exclusive of all false principles; that is, of all Southern principles not agrarian likewise. As for emotionalism, if our title inspires the wrong emotions, they will probably subside when the emoted reaches the definition in the subtitle. . . .

We might add: . . . The issue of communism is a good one that we might have made central to our exhibit, but did not. Actually, we only have one brief reference to that issue. . . . The book as it stands at present will have only the slightest relation to such a title.

Respectfully,

Donald Davidson

John Crowe Ransom

[September 5, 1930]

More conversations about the issue ensued in Nashville. Lytle reported to Tate that in answer to the objection that communism had not been made the central issue, "I made the point that no paper was needed, because the defense of agrarianism was, itself, an attack on Communism, that a paper on the subject would expose it only as a particular evil, one among many, which instead of clearing the debris for the attack would further confuse it."²

So the original title was retained and the footnote appeared with Tate's article rather than with the "Statement of Principles" (where it might seem more logically to belong). Only obliquely indicating the nature and intensity of the disagreement, Tate wrote:

The writer is constrained to point out (with the permission of the other contributors) that in his opinion the general title of this book is not quite true to its aims. It emphasizes the fact of exclusiveness rather than its benefits; it points to a particular house but omits to say that it was the home of a spirit that may also have

¹ See Appendix A, "A Statement of Principles."

² Postscript of letter to Allen Tate, "Monday Evening," dated Spring, 1930 by Allen Tate; however, the letter must have been written some time after September 5, probably September 8.

lived elsewhere and that this mansion, in short, was incidentally made with hands.¹

Tate predicted an emotional, uncomprehending sort of attack, based on the implications of the title, and it came.² Writing to Davidson immediately after their failure to make a last-minute change, Tate declared:

It is over now. Your title triumphs. And I observe that Alexander [of the Nashville Tennessean] today on the basis of the title defines our aims as an "agrarian revival" and reduces our real aims to nonsense. These are, of course, an agrarian revival in the full sense, but by not making our appeal through the title to ideas, we are at the mercy of all the Alexanders--for they need only to draw portraits of us plowing or cleaning the spring to make hash of us before we get a hearing.³

¹ I'll Take My Stand, p. 155.

² See pp. 339 ff.

³ As quoted by Donald Davidson in "I'll Take My Stand: A History," p. 315. Not all of the contributors had been satisfied with the word "agrarian," either as a term representing their philosophy or as part of the title, although this issue had apparently not been discussed very extensively. Stark Young stated in 1952 that he had always felt the word "agrarian" was likely to give an inadequate idea of what they meant or implied (Shenandoah, III [Autumn, 1952], 39). Wade wrote recently, "I was myself never happy about the word 'agrarian.' I had a feeling that it would be often misunderstood, and that it was part of our responsibility to speak in a way that could be comprehended." (Letter to Virginia Rock, July 17, 1958.) Frank Owsley, at the Fugitive Reunion in 1956, said that the word suggested connotations they did not intend: "It was a mistake . . . because we got tagged, and everybody thought we ought to go out and plow. And this was a philosophy, not an economy." (Fugitives' Reunion, p. 206.) Kline spoke on the issue at the time the symposium was being planned: "Agrarian is a word which needs a great deal of defining--of what [it] does not mean or connote fully as much as what it does mean. Just offhand, one might think the movement had something to do with Farm Relief; that, on the basis of the Articles alone, a program devoted to making 'every man the grower of his own food' is being advocated. Unfortunately, for generalization I can think of no term better than the agrarian. If it were a personal expression of mine own, I'd probably say individualistic, but that probably won't get over what you're driving at so well as the other word--and it would require fully as much defining and delimitation." (March 13, 1930.)

Several years later, in his account of the history of the group, Davidson acknowledged the soundness of Tate's prediction: "Tate was exactly right as to what would happen, though now he says: 'It would have happened anyway.'"¹ The title, said Tate in a recent comment on the symposium, was "too self-conscious."²

Finally, another editorial difficulty developed; this centered on Robert Penn Warren's essay, "Briar Patch," a discussion of the position of the Negro in the South and his relation to agrarianism. That this would be a difficult topic to handle Warren realized even before he began to work on his article:

The negro is a delicate subject and one which could be most easily attacked; consequently, for my own good and the good of others, I can't afford to pull a boner in dealing with it. Don seems to have . . . a touching faith in my ability to bring the thing off; at the moment I am afraid that I don't share his optimism on that score.

[Letter to Allen Tate, May 19, 1930]

The essay which he produced and had sent to Davidson by mid-summer was written at Oxford shortly after he had completed his first attempt at fiction, a long story called Prime Leaf. The contrast between his feelings about writing two types of prose Warren finds most significant; for him the essay now seems an abstract statement, while the story was concrete and real:

I remember the jangle and wrangle of writing the essay and some kind of discomfort in it, some sense of evasion, I guess, in writing it, in contrast with the free feeling of writing the novelette Prime Leaf, the sense of seeing something fresh, the holiday sense plus some stirring up of something inside yourself. In the essay I reckon I was trying to prove something and in the novelette trying to find out something, see something, feel something--exist. . . . In a little while I realized I simply couldn't have written that essay again. I guess trying to write fiction made me realize that. If you are seriously trying to

¹ "I'll Take My Stand: A History," p. 315.

² Interview, April 23, 1957.

write fiction you can't allow yourself as much evasion as in trying to write essays.¹

Warren's position on the Negro in the South, as he himself sees it now, was "a defense of segregation."² The arrival of Warren's essay in mid-summer precipitated some earnest conversations and discussions by letter. Davidson was "shocked" and immediately wrote Tate asking his frank opinion about the suitability of the article for the symposium. Owsley, Ransom, and Lanier were also called in to read it over.

The objections Davidson raised were in part sectional, in part editorial. He found the essay too "progressive" in tone; he noted that in general it was not closely enough related to the central arguments of I'll Take My Stand, and he feared that it might damage their cause with a Southern audience. Feeling that the essay was "hardly worthy of Red or . . . of the subject" and that it goes off on a tangent to discuss the Negro problem in general (. . . not our main concern)," Davidson was disturbed by the conviction that Warren's idea did not seem to "chime with our ideas as I understand them" and by the "progressive" implications, some of which "would irritate and dismay the very Southern people to whom we are appealing." Davidson's reaction was one of disbelief:

It doesn't sound like Red at all. . . . The very language, the catchwords, somehow don't fit. I am almost inclined to doubt whether RED ACTUALLY WROTE THIS ESSAY! Would Red say, "Mrs. Robeson" in referring to a negro woman³--

¹"The Art of Fiction XVIII," p. 124.

²Ibid. The discussion of Warren's contribution to I'll Take My Stand was initiated by the interviewers for The Paris Review with the characterization of his point of view in the essay as "orthodox and unreconstructed." To this Warren made no objection.

³Davidson's reasons for objecting to the use of "Mrs." in referring to Paul Robeson's wife are partially explained in a later letter: "A part of my feeling about 'Mrs. Robeson' probably came from my knowledge of the book the woman wrote which to me is a well-meaning but detestable document, illustrating perfectly the old, old doctrine that both you and Red have discoursed on,--to wit, that Northern idealism about the negro is messy in practice. And what looks good, logically, about the negro, only makes a fool of him in practice" (letter to Allen Tate, July 23, 1930).

especially in a book expected to go to a Southern audience? Would Red talk of "negro society" and of "equality" with such glibness as he here exhibits? . . . Either Red has got very far away from us all in his thinking, or he has, in desperation after waiting a long while, resorted to some subterfuge which he intends to explain later.

Whatever has happened, I have begun to be quite doubtful in my mind as to whether this essay, dealing as it does with a matter of such grave importance, ought to go into the book.¹

[Letter to Tate, July 21, 1930]

Tate wrote an immediate reassurance, indicating that he thought the essay was good and certainly should be included in the volume. In reply, Davidson reiterated some of his objections, added reasons to support his position, and raised the question of their exercising an editorial prerogative of fitting the essay to the other contributions by making a few changes:

From our standpoint there is a considerable amount of irrelevant material in Red's essay, and he covers ground that has been pretty much hashed and rehashed, ad infinitum, in late years--and, in the sociological particulars, without adding very much.

[July 23, 1930]

Continuing with the observation that Warren should be "protected from himself" since he is going to teach in Memphis (Southwestern College)--"Memphians and Mississippians and Arkansans might consider [his terms] 'advanced' or 'radical,'" Davidson added: "I believe we are duty bound to protect our project as a whole, by tempering his phrases a little here and there if we can do so without injuring his sentiments." However, Davidson concluded, if Lanier and Ransom should think as favorably of the essay as Tate, "I'll certainly withdraw my objections."

Both Ransom and Lanier agreed with Tate that the essay should be included in the volume, although Lanier was somewhat more doubtful than were Tate and Ransom. Writing to

¹It should be pointed out, Davidson recently observed, that Warren had not shared intimately in the long series of discussions which led to the symposium nor was he very well "posted" on events in the United States and the way other members of the group were thinking about them.

Tate even before he had an opportunity to read the essay, Lanier indicated his disinclination to serve as a censor or judge:

Don tells me that he is sending Red's essay to you, and that he is overcome by doubt as to its appropriateness in the book. Not having read the paper, I can't say anything about it. I do think, however, that it is entirely too presumptuous to try to withdraw it, under the circumstances. . . . I confess that I was sorry Red chose that particular topic for many reasons, but his choice was somewhat limited. After all the rest of us had finished, and it is an important issue. I am going by Don's office Wednesday to see it, although I don't feel competent to pass judgment on the fitness of an essay which a writer has submitted for a book whose proposed content is entirely familiar to him. Red knows what the book is about and it is his business to know further whether or not he can contribute an essay to it. If he thinks his essay fits into, say, the spirit of the preface, I can't see where we have any grounds for complaint. After all, we are twelve individuals and each shoulders his own responsibility.

[July 21, 1930]

His report to Tate of his "impressionistic" reaction to the article not only reinforced some of Davidson's doubts but added others; at the same time he reaffirmed his conviction that he would not feel justified in demanding it be omitted from the book, even though he disagreed with it and found it "none too good." It "smacks a little too much of the Inter-racial Commission," has "errors in interpretation of facts or social relations," and offers "nothing essentially new," he felt. Admitting that he might be "surfeited with too much reading on the negro problem", Lanier added that "for the general reader who knows little about the problem, it may be quite good." As for Davidson's reactions, Lanier observed that "Don's general objection comes from the fact that Red's paper is out of harmony with the traditional Southern attitude toward the negro" and has "the tone of . . . an aggregation of

¹ Lanier had been associated with Joseph Peterson at George Peabody College in an investigation of the psychological differences between the races. Entitled Studies in the Comparative Abilities of Whites and Negroes, it was published in 1929.

preachers, reformers, and leaders of the Mims' type [who] would try to bring the white and negro together in some vague fashion by trying to avoid the concrete social fact of race prejudice or by trying to minimize its force." In Lanier's opinion, race "is the only real issue on which Southerners can be differentiated from people in other sections" as well as the only question "on which any real unanimity of thought and action can be secured from Southern people at present. . . . Whether or not an essay in a book of this sort should reflect more of the Southern spirit" is, he wrote to Tate, "an interesting question." However, since he felt he had no jurisdiction over what Warren wrote, he concluded:

I refuse to get worked up over it, for I believe that Red's heart is in the right place. If it isn't he would have refused to contribute to the book since, I believe, he has read the articles and knew of its general tone.

[Letter to Allen Tate, August 1, 1930]

Ransom had divided feelings about the essay. He found the writing "very good" and thought "it [is] better, on the whole, that Red assumes a kindly attitude toward the negro than otherwise."¹ But, reported Davidson to Tate in summarizing Ransom's views,

. . . it could bear considerable amendment, and especially on two points: that of "equality" and that of agricultural as opposed to industrial occupation. With reference to the first, Ransom thinks Red ought to make clearer than he does his advocacy of a separate negro community life. . . . Second, Ransom thinks Red astonishingly misses chances to make points for the agrarian regime; . . .

Davidson concluded with the suggestion that if Warren did not come to Nashville before the copy was to be sent to the publisher,

. . . we might do some minor retouching, add a few sentences, perhaps a paragraph or so to take care of the points mentioned, and send it in, leaving Red to O. K. or reject, in the proof, the changes we have made. After all, this is no more than Red has agreed to. For in his

¹ Donald Davidson to Allen Tate, Saturday, 1930 (probably July 26).

letter to me he says: "If for any reason--such as adjusting one essay to another--you wish to make certain changes or point up certain arguments please consider yourself as having a free hand."

"The Briar Patch," as it finally appeared, had undergone some editing--there was no reference to Mrs. Robeson, for instance--but the reference to "equality" and a "negro society" remained. In point of view as well as in style, the published essay appears to be Warren's. And the general statement in the Manifesto explicitly absolved contributors from any responsibility for opinions expressed by others in their own essays: "But background and consultation as to the various topics were enough; there was to be no further collaboration. And so no single author is responsible for any view outside his own article."¹

On November 12, 1930, I'll Take My Stand was published by Harper and Brothers. So the symposium came into being. The years of thinking, the gradual intensification of thought and emotion, the careful planning flowered into a high-spirited expression of faith. In looking back on those years, Davidson recently said:

To me, personally, the most important thing is that we were willing to wrestle with difficult, very serious matters; that we felt, somehow, that we inescapably must, and could, grapple with the questions before us, as if our lives depended on it, and would be cowards not to try; that we all felt great joy; elation in having a chance to get into the fight--in making a chance, if we didn't have one.

[Letter to Virginia Rock, August 25, 1959]

The eagerness they all felt as they formulated their philosophy and mapped their strategy was symbolized in Tate's enthusiastic enjoinder to Davidson: "Please let me hear from you immediately. I am getting really excited."²

¹"Introduction," I'll Take My Stand, p. ix.

²Letter from Paris, August 10, 1929.

CHAPTER VI

THE SYMPOSIUM

I'll Take My Stand is a book of paradoxes, yet it is singularly unified. A collection of twelve essays by twelve Southerners of markedly different personalities on a variety of subjects--including agrarianism as the Southern way of life, the arts, Southern history, education, the philosophy of progress, religion, economics, race, individualism, and Southern tradition, the symposium revealed not only a concurrence in purpose but also a continuity in thought. Although the means they suggested and the emphasis on facets of Southern life differed, their essays converged at the same end: to reaffirm the values inherent in a way of life dependent upon nature and to denigrate the manifestations of an existence molded by science or the machine, i.e., the artificial.

Consciously they intended the book for Southerners, yet they also had in mind a wider audience. In late December, 1929, Davidson reported in a letter to Tate:

Our movement . . . more and more takes a broad range. In recent talks we have got the idea that perhaps we ought not to limit our consideration to the South, as sectionalists, endeavoring to reconstruct our home section and therefore addressing ourselves mainly to the South. Perhaps we ought to leave the gate open for an appeal to any of the parts of the country that may be suffering from the invasion of the metropolitan, industrial, business mind and that may be restive under the yoke of progress. Perhaps our program develops into a program of provincialism in general, not only Southern provincialism, and with it all the values (to be defined and announced) that belong to a country life, decentralized, stable, local, self-sufficient, etc., as opposed to the other thing now rampant but already attacked from various quarters. In that view, the South would be the most obvious historical and contemporary example available, and the most exciting example; but we would thus be able to make it clear that we are not

proposing simply a romantic secession, but a straightforward set of doctrines for the day, opening a fertile field of general interest anywhere, but especially to Southerners, our immediate concern.

[December 29, 1929]

While consciously addressed to Southerners who were "being converted frequently to the industrial gospel" and who were to be persuaded to "come back to the support of the Southern tradition," I'll Take My Stand also had in mind "other minority communities opposed to industrialism, and wanting a much simpler economy to live by." The appeal was intended at once, then, to be both sectional and national: "Proper living is a matter of the intelligence and the will, does not depend on the local climate or geography, and is capable of a definition which is general and not Southern at all."¹

That the Agrarians were seeking to cure the economic, social, and spiritual ills of the time by means different from those being advanced by other thinkers or groups is explicitly suggested in Davidson's December, 1929, letter to Tate:

[The doctrines] would amount to this: that we would go beyond the scientific meliorists. . . , beyond the humanists, who after all are vague, and entirely away from the Mencken-Lewis trend (I should say theirs is a criticism of manners only), and diametrically opposite to the socialistic radicals (who have a megapolitan proposition to urge), and we should offer a doctrine full of rich particularity and immense appeal. . . . It will come up in clearer form in the Credo.

[December 29, 1929]

The nature of their program and the quality of their appeal do emerge in their Manifesto. How it was formulated and some of the changes it underwent reveal not only the development and clarification of their Agrarian philosophy but also their unique characteristics as a group.

The Manifesto: "A Statement of Principles"

Formulating a creed to which all twelve of the contributors to the symposium would subscribe--both in content

¹"Introduction--A Statement of Principles," pp. x-xi.

and in phrasing--entailed both earnest discussions and an exchange of letters offering detailed suggestions for additions, revisions in phrasing, further definition, and reinforcement of particular points. An early version of the Manifesto, circulated among members of the group in February and March, was strikingly different in tone from the published "Statement of Principles." Set up as a formal document with a sort of preamble and a list of several articles, it was at the same time more personal and direct in its phrasing.¹ The personal pronoun "we" was used freely in the early version; it was almost completely eliminated in the published Manifesto: "We shall not mind," it was stated in a draft of the Manifesto, "if these Articles are taken as a sort of Credo, to which the undersigned hereby profess their allegiance. We shall not mind, either, if the present book is taken as but the first of a series of activities in support of the articles. But we do not at this moment undertake any specific program of activities."² The published version was less explicit about what might follow:

It seemed that they ought to go on and make themselves known as a group already consolidated by a set of principles which could be stated with a good deal of particularity. This might prove useful for the sake of future reference, if they should undertake any further joint publication. It was then decided to prepare a general introduction for the book which would state briefly the common convictions of the group. This is the statement. To it every one of the contributors in this book has subscribed.³

Apparently the group agreed that the form of the Manifesto as a series of Articles would not do; Ransom had said they were too dogmatic, too brash and personal; Kline felt they had a revolutionary or religious tone. Several group

¹For the complete text of the two versions, see Appendix A, "Articles of an Agrarian Reform" and "A Statement of Principles."

²"Articles of an Agrarian Reform," p. 1 (Ms.).

³"Introduction--A Statement of Principles," p. x.

discussions ensued, concerned with matters of strategy, expediency, and tone. What emerged from the conferring by meeting and letter was very much what Ransom had wished for: "A statement of principles, rather miscellaneous but more full and leisurely than in their present form."¹

In doctrine the two versions did not differ significantly. Both described the symposium as a group effort; both defended the agrarian way of life as the Southern; both attacked industrialism and its effects; both implied that modern education which attempts to spread culture will not cure the poverty of the contemporary spirit; both acknowledged the intentional avoidance of a specific program and suggested the possibility of working through the Democratic party or, if that failed, of seeking the formation of an Agrarian party.

Yet there were differences in the versions--and it is in these that the character and value of group activity are revealed. As a result of suggestions, certain argumentative or debatable points were eliminated from the introduction and developed more fully in particular essays: e.g., the relationship of Southern culture to European; the inveighing against "Industrial Progress"; the frank admission that the appeal to Southerners was "romantic and sectional." The final group statement issued a more detailed description of industrialism--in effect a definition; introduced the term "new South" as representing a dangerous temptation; focused the attack specifically on science and technology; named as inevitable consequences of "industrial progress" "the rise of modern advertising [and] its twin, personal salesmanship"; enumerated the results of industrialism: "overproduction, unemployment, and a growing inequality in the distribution of wealth"; by implication criticized the "remedial programs" offered by the "apologists of industrialism" (and thus laid the foundation for one of the unique Agrarian arguments used in their later public debates--that finance capitalism implies communism):

¹Letter to Tate, Saturday, the 15th [February, 1930]. See p. 249 above.

These apologists, the published Manifesto asserted, were the Optimists (who see the system righting itself spontaneously); the Cooperationists or Socialists (who "rely on the benevolence of capital, or the militancy of labor, to bring about a fairer division of the spoils"); and the Sovietists who are "super-engineers, in the shape of Boards of Control, who will adapt production to consumption and regulate prices and guarantee business against fluctuations":

The true Sovietists or Communists . . . are the Industrialists themselves. They would have the government set up an economic super-organization, which in turn would become the government. We therefore look upon the Communist menace as a menace indeed, but not as a Red one; because it is simply according to the blind drift of our industrial development to expect in America at last much the same economic system as that imposed by violence upon Russia in 1917.¹

The effect of industrialism on religion was spelled out. Whereas an earlier version had been content with grouping aesthetic enjoyment and religious contemplation into one Article and had asserted that these depended upon a love of nature and "the realistic confession that nature is invincible," the final Statement treated the two separately and made explicit why "religion can hardly expect to flourish in an industrial society": "The sense of Nature as something mysterious and contingent" is lost; the God of Nature "is merely an amiable expression, a superfluity." One other important addition to their Credo was the statement on Humanism. Probably first suggested by Tate, the addition merely alluded to the views of the New Humanists who, less than a year before, had been the object of heated discussion, letters, and articles from various members of the Agrarian group, a result of Robert Shafer's personal and "insulting" attack on Tate in the pages of the Bookman early in 1930.² Humanism was

¹"Introduction--A Statement of Principles," pp. xiii-xiv. This section was probably added as a result of the discussion about a title change to "Tracts Against Communism."

²The controversy exploded in January, 1930, when editor Seward Collins published in The Bookman an essay called

considered a competing view by the Agrarians, both in philosophy and in timing. While the plans for I'll Take My Stand

"Humanism and Impudence" by Robert Shafer. An attack on Tate's "The Fallacy of Humanism," which had first appeared in The Criterion, July, 1929, Shafer's essay, in its attempt to refute Tate, was imprudently personal in some portions and ostensibly logical in others: "I do not hastily or willingly accuse Mr. Tate of deliberate misrepresentation," he wrote in his introduction; "I am brought to it only after finding it simply not possible otherwise to describe his work." Tate's article, he concluded, was "at once absurd and mischievous," and the author, he implied, might appropriately be described as Sir John Daw was in The Silent Woman--"A mere talking mole! A fellow so utterly nothing as he knows not what he would be." According to Shafer, Tate's interest in religion was sociological and political, as his "account of the 'virtue' and of the 'office' of religion-in-general shows." At first, religion was treated by Tate as unimportant, but at the end it became essential; a fair illustration of his idea of "reason," according to Shafer, was to criticize Humanism on the one hand for advocating the use of the historical method as an adjunct to criticism, while on the other hand to accuse the Humanists of incompetence in criticism, partly on the ground that they have persistently ignored conditions out of which books emerge. "Many of Tate's remarks," Shafer argued, "proceed from the 'organic' point of view which, carried to a vicious extreme, eschews distinctions and logically ends in abdication of judgment, in impressionism, and in silent ecstasy." (LXX, 489-98.)

An exchange of letters among several of the Agrarians (Tate, Davidson, Ransom, Warren, and Lanier) discussed the New Humanism in general and the Shafer article in particular. Angered by its tone, Ransom wrote an analysis and attack, "Humanists and Schoolmasters"; although it was not published, some of its ideas and occasional phrases or passages found their way into I'll Take My Stand. Almost simultaneous with Shafer's essay, Tate's revision of "The Fallacy of Humanism" appeared in the Winter, 1930, issue of Hound and Horn; in this version which he used to refute Shafer's charges he clarified certain passages on religion. Supporting one of his central objections to the Humanists--that they suggest no way "under the special complexities and distractions of the modern world" by which "they intend to validate their values," Tate concluded in his answer, "The Same Fallacy of Humanism": "It tries to take a short-cut to the resultant situation and ignores the social difficulty of making or reconstructing an appropriate background; . . . it is an effort to imitate by rote the natural product of culture; it is a mechanical formula for the recovery of civilization. It is the cart before the horse, and because it gets the 'philosophy' in the wrong place, it invites philosophical attack." (The Bookman, LXXI [March, 1930], 31-36.)

Comments on the humanists continued to appear in The Bookman, the Nation, the New Republic, and the Virginia Quarterly Review. Another symposium, The Critique of Humanism,

were just being completed, Humanism and America,¹ the symposium edited by Norman Foerster, was being widely reviewed. Allen Tate wrote Davidson on February 9, 1930, explaining why he felt the group should publish the Manifesto separately that spring: "The Humanist symposium is out and because we raise the same issues in another form we must profit by their furore, at least with the Manifesto, since we can't with our book." In reply Davidson agreed after looking into the collection of essays, "It's quite evident that they have some of our doctrines, so

edited by C. Hartley Grattan, was published later in 1930. Here Tate's essay, revised again, was included along with contributions by Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, Kenneth Burke, R. P. Blackmur, and others. In the light of a later relationship between The Bookman editor, Seward Collins, and various members of the Agrarian group, his comment on Tate's essay and views is interesting: "[Tate's] third version of what he 'really said' is no less confused than the others, and gives the unmistakable picture of a man treading water furiously in the hope that firm land will come up under him. Nevertheless Mr. Tate knows far better than any of his companions in the Critique the worth of the men he is assailing. His statement 'The case of the American humanists against modern culture is damaging to the last degree; the truth of their indictment, negatively considered, cannot be denied', disposes of everyone else in the book" (Criticism in America, " The Bookman, LXXII [October, 1930], 223).

¹ Subtitled "Essays on the Outlook of Modern Civilization," the Humanist symposium included among others essays by Irving Babbitt, "Humanism: an Essay at Definition"; Paul Elmer More, "The Humility of Common Sense"; T. S. Eliot, "Religion without Humanism"; Robert Shafer, "An American Tragedy [on Dreiser]"; and Gorham B. Munson, "Our Critical Spokesmen." This array of literary critics did not, however, impress certain reviewers for some liberal journals: Henry Hazlitt in the Nation, February 12, 1930, declared, "Of all the strange crazes that sweep semiannually over American criticism, surely none will seem odder to the future literary historian than the present attempt to pump life into that peculiar rationalization of reaction and gentility that passes at present under the name of humanism." The name, he wrote, had been degraded to a "hide-bound academicism" ("All Too Humanism," CXXX, 181-82). An editorial published in the New Republic at the same time reflected a tone of ridiculing a "teapot tempest" and noted that "the Humanists direct their vision further and further into a past where they claim to discern our only refuge. . . ." ("The Embattled Humanists," LXI [February 12, 1930], 315).

to speak, embedded, but in the main they seem to write about Art and do not offer much real social thinking."¹ It was on this basis that the Agrarians attacked humanism in their "Statement of Principles" and in some of their individual essays. Both groups were concerned with the unfortunate state of modern culture and the effects of "progress" and both recognized the importance of the aesthetic, but the Agrarians found the Humanists "too abstract"; their "gospel" too intellectual and vague; their system of "moral checks"--derived from the classics, especially Aristotle, lacking a dogma and too dependent upon the individual; their whole approach to the modern world too academic, proposing as Davidson described it, "to superimpose a vague scheme of art-criticism-education on a social system that is about to reject it."² Thus, in the Credo, the Agrarians maintained that true humanism "is not an abstract system, but a culture, the whole way in which we live, act, think, and feel. It is a kind of imaginatively balanced life lived out in a definite social tradition"³. . . . It was deeply founded in the way of life itself--in its tables, chairs, portraits, festivals, laws, marriage customs."⁴ This group attack on the New Humanism was reinforced by individual essays: Tate's discussion of religion, for instance, owed much to his analysis in, and subsequent revisions of "The Fallacy of Humanism"; Davidson's "A Mirror for Artists" contains in strikingly original phrasing an incisive description of certain weaknesses of Humanism:

The Humanists commend us to Sophocles and God, in vacuo. Their thinking stops where it should begin, with social conditions that shape the artist's reaction. Like Arnold

¹ Letter to Allen Tate, February 25, 1930.

² Ibid.

³ The "definite social tradition" was defined in the "Statement of Principles" as "the agrarian life of the older South and of other parts of the country that shared in such a tradition."

⁴ "Introduction--A Statement of Principles," p. xvi.

they imagine that culture will conquer Philistinism and have faith that the "best" ideas will prevail over the false ideas or no-ideas of the great Anarch. In Arnold's time it was reasonable to entertain such a hope. Today it is the academic equivalent of Y. M. C. A. "leadership."¹

What had begun as an individual attack on the Humanists in 1929--in Tate's "The Fallacy of Humanism"--had broadened into a motif of Agrarianism: Southern regional characteristics were the concrete denial of the literary and cultural abstractions of Humanism, as well as of science and industrialism.

Perhaps the most striking single change in rephrasing appears in the first paragraph of the "Statement of Principles." Although the early version had consistently, by juxtaposition of ideas and by specific details, implied the central opposition, nowhere did a statement appear like "All the articles bear in the same sense upon the book's title-subject; all tend to support a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way; and all as much as agree that the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase, Agrarian versus Industrial."² The closest the "Articles of an Agrarian Reform" came to this clarification were the first sentences of the first two Articles: "The good life"³ must be lived much closer to the land than the ruling American ideal permits. . . . Opposed to the Southern way of life is the orthodox American way which may be defined as the industrial way."⁴ A more explicit statement of the theory of agrarianism appeared in the final version of the Manifesto: "The culture of the soil is the

¹I'll Take My Stand, p. 42. Fletcher considered the first and last sentences of this passage magnificent.

²Ibid., p. ix.

³The phrase "the good life" was objected to and "proper living" appeared as a substitute in the published Manifesto. "Humane life," "civilized life," and "happiest possible life" were also suggested by various members of the group.

⁴Articles 1 and 2, p. 1 (ms.).

best and most sensitive of vocations, and . . . therefore it should have the economic preference and enlist the maximum number of workers."¹ "Articles of an Agrarian Reform" which served as a basis for the final draft had described agrarianism instead in terms of its effects: "Its benefits, which are spiritual, will consist primarily in peace, stability, and leisure, which seem to be the conditions to any intelligent pursuit of happiness."²

The "Statement of Principles," which had been drawn up for the sake of unity, had achieved its end; the essays that followed were but amplifications and variations on the motifs sounded in the "Introduction."

The Essays³

Five years after the symposium was published Davidson asserted in his history of the book that because the group wished to avoid drawing a mellow and pretty picture of an idealized past, they were determined to make the broadest possible application of their views on industrialism⁴: hence, the variety of subjects, the soliciting of contributions from men of different disciplines. Two of the contributors--John Gould Fletcher and Stark Young, then best known as a poet and drama critic--were literary personages of national reputation. The four former Fugitives, through frequent publication of poetry and criticism in New York as well as in Southern journals, had their careers as men of letters well launched. Indeed, all of the contributors, except for Henry Blue Kline, had published or were about to publish at least one book.

The individual contributions might be discussed in a variety of ways, but to best represent the cumulative effect

¹"Introduction--A Statement of Principles," p. xix.

²"Articles of an Agrarian Reform," Article 6, pp. 2-3 (ms.).

³Quotations in this chapter from the individual essays in I'll Take My Stand will hereafter be identified by page references only.

⁴"I'll Take My Stand: A History," p. 312.

of the essays, perhaps a brief summary should be given of the thesis and argument of each article in the order it appears, quoting the authors' own reactions wherever they are available. But I'll Take My Stand is also a group effort, and the hope expressed in the "Statement of Principles"--that "it was through the good fortune of some deeper agreement that the book was expected to achieve its unity"--was realized, for a careful study of the individual essays reveals a striking unanimity in convictions. The symposium opens with John Crowe Ransom's vigorous call to arms, "Reconstructed but Unregenerate." A coalescence of two essays published in 1928 and 1929,¹ this defense of the Southern habit of looking to the past--characterized by the author as "antique conservatism"--was offered as a means of resisting the American gospels of Progress and Service. Not that the South could entirely escape from industrialization, but, Ransom pleaded, the European-derived Southern art of living, which was a "rural sort of establishment," ought to be preserved. "Intelligent Southern policy," he pointed out, can move along two lines: first, it can arouse sectional feeling to the point of ferocity and resistance against the "salesmen of industrialism" who are foreign invaders of Southern soil "capable of doing more devastation than was wrought when Sherman marched to the sea"; second, and this is the more statesmanlike course, Ransom admitted, it can reenter the American political arena through a combination with "other minority groups . . . circumstanced similarly." The principle to be fought for is to be defined "as agrarian, conservative, anti-industrial," Ransom concluded,

¹"The South--Old or New?" Sewanee Review, April, 1928, pp. 138-147 and "The South Defends Its Heritage," Harper's Magazine, June, 1929, pp. 108-18. Ransom had originally intended to entitle his Harper's article "Reconstructed but Unregenerate," but it was changed by the editors, he said, possibly because it was too sectional in tone. In a collection of essays as obviously partisan, this title suggested the leitmotif for the symposium.

though in discussing the political possibilities, he felt, "I get quickly beyond my depth."

* * *

"A Mirror for Artists" by Donald Davidson describes and deplores the effect of industrialism upon the arts and culture. "Industrialism cannot play the rôle of Mæcenas," Davidson asserted, "because its complete ascendancy will mean that there will be no arts left to foster; or if they exist at all, they will flourish only in a diseased and disordered condition. . . ." The societies which have produced art in the past, Davidson asserted, "were for the most part stable, religious, and agrarian." Their scale of values had little to do with industrialism, their "chief subject of art, in the final sense, [was] nature." Even the arguments advanced by defenders of industrialism--that more leisure is provided, that art may be more readily and widely distributed--are either spurious or doubtful, Davidson asserted. Leisure becomes "pure sloth" and the arts are used as mere entertainment or it is "another kind of labor" undertaken with a sense of duty to culture. The kind of art that is distributed widely makes an appeal to "the lowest common denominator"; with the technique of mass production, quality, Davidson pointed out, is invariably sacrificed to quantity. And if any other evidence is needed, one has only to look at the relationship of the artist to his society: he is "no longer with society. . .; he is against or away from society, and the disturbed relation becomes his essential theme." As a result he develops a highly personal, indeed unique style; he sings for a diminishing audience or for himself; or "he exaggerates feeling at the expense of thought." The hope for the artist in general, and for the Southern writer in particular, Davidson concluded, is "to be a person first of all, . . . [to] enter the common arena and become a citizen," to rehabilitate the Southern tradition which happens to be agrarian and therefore "needs to be defined for the present age as a mode of life congenial to the arts . . . a last stand in America against the industrial devourer."

* * *

In "The Irrepressible Conflict" historian Frank Lawrence Owsley argued a Southern sectionalists' view of the Civil War: the industrial North, exploitative at the expense of the South, commercial, seeking favors from the government of doubtful constitutionality, forced the agrarian South to resort to states rights as a defense mechanism for slavery and for its "entire system of society." Slavery, Owsley maintained, had practically been imposed upon the country by England; and once it was established, there was no way to eliminate it practically; "Negroes had come into the Southern colonies in such numbers that people feared for the integrity of the white race" since "the negroes were cannibals and barbarians." The system was, Owsley said, "no essential part of the agrarian civilization of the South," for "the economic and social life . . . would not have been radically different,"--the South would long have remained agricultural." Rather, the issue of slavery simply "furnished more fuel to the sectional conflict and created more bitterness than any or all the other elements." Hence, the irrepressible conflict--between the Jeffersonian, individualistic society which asked only to be let alone and the "uniform, standardized society" created by a "commercial and growing industrial system of the East.

This struggle between an agrarian and an industrial civilization . . . [was] the house divided against itself, . . . It was the doctrine of intolerance, crusading, standardizing alike in industry and in life. The South had to be crushed out; it was in the way; it impeded the progress of the machine. So Juggernaut drove his car across the South.¹

* * *

"Education, Past and Present" by John Gould Fletcher focuses at the outset on "the superior man, . . . who follows the right path, keeps watch in his heart over the principles which are not perceived by the many." Sounding this motif with the quotation from Confucius, Fletcher proceeded with a broad chronological survey of American education, supported at points by statistical evidence and reference to European practices. The Southern tradition of education from colonial times on has been better than that of the North, Fletcher maintained: pre-Revolutionary schools of the South were "much more tolerant, . . . free and easy, more humanistic, and more open to all classes of the population" than were

¹P. 91.

Northern institutions "tinged with the somber colours of Calvinistic, Congregational, or Unitarian orthodoxy." After the Revolutionary war, the system of importing tutors was replaced by the private academy which not only transmitted "the essentials of a good classical education" but made the "older Southern life and culture become what it was." The authority of Jefferson was invoked to support the view that education was and should continue to be provided for the intellectual élite; the academies, responding to the European philosophy of education, offered a "c l a s s i c a l and humanistic training," only to the class that had the time and leisure as well as an innate capacity and desire to learn something." In contrast, the evolving public-school system from the North, which necessarily superseded the academy in the South after its impoverishment of the Civil War, represented "nothing organic," and put through "every type of mind that can . . . rake up enough credits to make the grade." Modern American popular education unfortunately reverses the process, Fletcher felt:

The inferior, whether in life or in education, should exist only for the sake of the superior. We feed and clothe and exercise our bodies . . . in order to be able to do something with our minds. We employ our minds in order to achieve character, to become the balanced personalities, the "superior men" of Confucius' text, the "gentlemen" of the old South . . . But the present-day system . . . destroys intellectual self-reliance of character. . . . Its goal is industry rather than harmonious living, and self-aggrandisement rather than peace with God.¹

Although the South cannot destroy the public-school system, it can and ought to agitate for selecting the excellent students who would be "set apart . . . taught by real teachers," Fletcher felt; it can insist on the elimination of the elective system in the high schools; it can spend "less money on equipment and buildings and more on scholarship"; it can support state agricultural colleges and schools of manual training, arts and crafts, and vocational institutions, especially for Negroes. If not, Fletcher predicted, "in another generation

¹ Pp. 119-20.

nothing will remain of the local color, the diversity, the humanity, the charm of our South, and we will become assimilated outwardly and inwardly to the street gangs of New York and Chicago."

Other members of the Agrarian group were similarly concerned about the standardization of education, about the lower quality and the change of values which had spread through the academic world. Under the aegis of industrialism, numbers, quantitative measurements, they felt, had been equated with quality; mass consumption became evidence of hope for a spread of culture--and education was to be the panacea. Sons of Southern families, "flying south or flying north like migratory birds," Ransom observed, "must be educated in the principles of progress at progressive institutions of learning." "Education can do comparatively little to aid the cause of the arts," Davidson predicted, "as long as it must turn out graduates into the industrialized society which demands specialists in vocational, technical, and scientific subjects," and as long as "there is the almost overwhelming difficulty of communicating the humanities at all under systems of education, gigantic in their scope, that have become committed to industrial methods of administration--the entire repulsive fabric of standards, credits, units, scientific pedagogy, over-organization." Stark Young, like Fletcher, felt that "the education of the university sort, not professional or technical, is suited to a small number only"; "this . . . un-American idea of education may spread if in our schools and universities a less democratic, mobbed, and imitative course of things should come to be, with less booming and prating, organizing, unrest, babble about equipment, election of trustees from the Stock Exchange. . . ." But education, in itself, is no solution to the ills of the modern world, the Agrarians agreed. As they stated in their Manifesto: "The trouble with the life-pattern is to be located at its economic base, and we cannot rebuild it by pouring in soft materials from the top. The young men and women in colleges, . . . if they are already placed in a

false way of life, cannot make more than an inconsequential acquaintance with the arts and humanities transmitted to them."

* * *

Lyle H. Lanier's "A Critique of the Philosophy of Progress" presents a definition and discussion of "progress" as both a slogan and a philosophy. Structuring his examination on an impressive historical survey¹ of the concept from

¹ John Gould Fletcher found Lanier's essay the best in the volume for its sheer profundity of thought.

Lanier related the idea of progress to a philosophy of history. The doctrines of Christianity were the basis for the first definite philosophy of history, appearing in the Hellenistic-Roman period, although the teleology of Christianity, which denied value to earthly life, had no resemblance to the modern theory of "progress," he pointed out. Nor was there much evidence of a shift in interest to worldly progress during the middle ages. But the "revival of letters" in the fifteenth century, the development of Renaissance philosophy, and new scientific and geographical studies produced "a metaphysical view of the world which . . . would seem to underlie all doctrines of progress, namely the principle of immanence." The essential result of these changes, Lanier held, is embodied in the philosophy of Francis Bacon, the precursor of the pragmatic, "progressive" temper, which is followed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by a developing interest in psychology (Descartes and Hobbes), and a utilitarian theory of moral action, in general--representing a tendency against which the Agrarians were to struggle: "emancipation from the past, an attempt to settle the problems of man's nature and destiny in a purely abstract fashion and apart from the 'vital force of historical reality.'" (p. 129) With German idealism, Lanier noted, particularly in Hegel's metaphysics, the addition of English utilitarianism, the development in the natural sciences and technology, and the doctrine of natural rights, "the social, economic and political organization of the Western World" was changed significantly. The political democracy of America and France, which had been based upon an agrarian economy, was "disrupted by industrialism with its urbanization, shifting population, abnormal concentration of wealth, panics, unemployment, labor unions, and a train of attendant phenomena." Not without influence, Lanier suggested, were the views of August Comte, Herbert Spencer (whose view of evolution implies a naive ethical determinism), and William James; although he reacted against the materialistic aspects of American civilization (represented as the "Gilded Age"), "his pragmatic theory of truth and his metaphysical pluralism, with the further hypothesis of an 'open' world . . . were congenial both to the spirit of practicality of his time and to the popular notion of the upward sweep of human progress." And "to John Dewey," Lanier observed, "we must turn to find how the pragmatic spirit deals with concrete social problems." (Pp. 125-36)

the time of the Greeks (for whom the "chronological succession of events . . . toward some end" meant "little or nothing") to John Dewey's "instrumentalism," Lanier related the "mystic faith" of Americans in "progress"--now meaning business--to modern industrialism, which has exploited the term efficaciously "as a public anaesthetic." Indeed, Lanier pointed out, the concept of "progressive development toward some highly desired, but always undesigned, goal is perhaps the central psychological factor in the maintenance of our top-heavy industrial superstructure." With John Dewey, he noted, a new era in the development of the notion of progress is initiated. Dewey's philosophy, which regards the "changes in social organization and ideas, and the developments in scientific technology" as of "genuine importance" because "they represent a reaction against absolutism . . . in social institutions and in intellectual endeavors," ultimately must be questioned for the implications of its "metaphysical rendering of communism or socialism." The desirability of some form of collectivism as a means of eliminating the "evils of current economic and political systems" is not demonstrated, said Lanier, by logical cogency alone. Dewey's view that we are in for some kind of socialism and that our choice is limited to whether it will be public or capitalistic led Lanier to warn, as an Agrarian, that while industrial technology, so highly exalted by Dewey, "might appear to be the mechanism by which the ideal collective existence could be consummated,"--through "centralization of political power and governmental regulation of industrial processes"--there are "even greater possibilities of economic domination" by industry because centralized government agencies can be controlled with comparative ease.

Lanier's education and training in philosophy and psychology led him to criticize Dewey's fundamental assumptions: first, to remake human nature in order to make "public" socialism possible is, Lanier felt, a "process of very dubious prospect" at best:

Man is not a tabula rasa on which arbitrary patterns of conduct may be inscribed without regard to his natural propensities. His bodily organization at birth prescribes the general limits within which not only his overt forms of action, but also the dependable motives through which he can be stimulated, will tend to lie.¹

Second, Dewey's hope for the development of humane social institutions through collective behavior or expression of group purposes and ideals is not substantiated by ethnology, history, and psychology; such "collective behavior . . . is not characteristic of actual group thought and action, either past or present." If ever a nation needed "geniuses," "heroes," or "divine leaders," i.e., "superior people," Lanier observed, America does in order to render the impulses of a people articulate and to give direction. Third, he refuted Dewey's assumption that an industrial, corporate order tends to promote human association and thus enhances the "liberation of capacity" by an examination of the kind of relation it promotes; while a greater similarity in the behavior patterns of individuals is apparent, "this by no means insures real communion." To find a psychological communion of the kind Dewey envisioned, Lanier pointed to the agrarian community and the villages and towns which are its adjuncts. Since the industrial order has become dominant, the family has declined; the sequel is "personal isolation and a fractionation of life functions." Lanier's attack is not on the machine itself or even on the resulting technology, but on the continuous drive to increase the production and consumption of goods. He regretted that "men, women, and children will have no humanized living; caught in the throes of these convulsions of a predatory and decadent capitalism, their drab existences will bear mute testimony that our century of Progress lies below the cultural level of the Pyramids." The solution is "to renounce the capitalistic industrial program." Technology should not be scrapped; rather, further mechanization should be encouraged in order to free man and thus to induce him "to return to

¹P. 142.

agriculture." Like Ransom's, Davidson's, and Fletcher's essays, Lanier's concludes with a call for action, mobilization for a specific program of rehabilitation of the agrarian economy:

The instrumentalities of intelligent political leadership, informed social science, and a definitive social philosophy could have no more important problem than that of trying to effect a synthesis, in some sense, of the unified manner of living inherent in the agrarian family and community with the energy and inventiveness which have been diverted into industrialism.¹

That other Agrarians shared Lanier's questioning of the philosophy of "Progress" is obvious; their very participation in the symposium is irrefutable evidence. But more specifically, most of the group explicitly attacked either its assumptions or its effects. Ransom, for example, criticized its constant shifts of goals, its failure to offer men a sense of peace or feeling of achievement:

It is the character of our urbanized, anti-provincial, progressive, and mobile American life that it is in a condition of eternal flux. . . . Progress never defines its ultimate objective, but thrusts its victims at once into an infinite series. Our vast industrial machine, with its laboratory centers of experiment, and its far-flung organs of mass production, is like a Prussianized state which is organized strictly for war and can never consent to peace. . . . The concept of progress is the concept of man's increasing command . . . over the forces of nature; a concept which enhances too readily our conceit, and brutalizes our life.²

Davidson described the effects of progress on art and leisure--when the industrialist reorganized society "according to theories of material progress":

The kind of leisure provided by industrialism is a dubious benefit. It helps nobody but merchants and manufacturers, who have taught us to use it in industriously consuming the products they make in great excess over the demand. Moreover, it is spoiled, as leisure, by the kind of work that industrialism compels. The furious pace of our working hours is carried over into our leisure hours, which are feverish and energetic. We live by the clock. . . .

¹Pp. 153-54.

²Pp. 5, 8, 10.

We do not have the free mind and easy temper that should characterize true leisure. Nor does the separation of our lives into two distinct parts, of which one is all labor--too often mechanical and deadening--and the other all play, undertaken as a nervous relief, seem to be conducive to a harmonious life. The arts will not easily survive a condition under which we work and play at cross purposes. We cannot separate our being into contradictory halves without a certain amount of spiritual damage.¹

Lytle lamented the unfortunate effect of the "progressives" on provincial life and isolated some of the causes:

The country church languishes, the square dance disappears, and camp meetings are held, but they have lost their vitality. Self-consciousness has crept into the meetings, . . .

[The farmer] finds that there is a vast propaganda teaching him, but particularly his children, to despise the life he has led and would like to lead again. It has in its organization public schools, high schools, the normals, and even the most reputable universities, the press, salesmen, and all the agents of industrialism. It has set out to uplift him.²

And Kline's William Remington came to realize:

With a central paternalistic government tending to reduce every metropolis and hamlet of the nation to a cultural common denominator, with cheap and rapid transportation and highly organized communications tending to extend the metropolitan areas and their indigenous ideals over most of the forty-eight states, with imperialistic industrial exploiters abroad in the land, any ideal of provincialism can be kept in force only by fighting for it.³

The Southerner's "anti-progressive" attitude is represented metaphorically in Stark Young's imagined conversation with an "opponent . . . [who] has only a jumble of puerile catchwords":

"In our town we've got twenty thousand miles of concrete walks."

"And where do they lead?" I say.
He will not have thought of that.⁴

* * *

Perhaps the essay in the symposium most "poetic" in its structure is Allen Tate's "Remarks on the Southern

¹ P. 34.

² P. 242.

³ P. 323.

⁴ P. 335.

Religion." His plan for the essay and his assumptions and convictions about modern religion were made explicit in an abstract which he sent to Davidson and a comment which was published in the Atlanta Journal a few months after the symposium appeared. Suggesting as a provisional title, "Religion as Time," Tate summarized for Davidson the argument of his analysis with more specific allusions than appeared in his final version:

Fundamentalism defended, and Dayton explained historically.-- The anomaly of dogmatic Protestantism in the feudal South explained as follows: the body politic replaced the body of Christ, a highly developed sense of individual responsibility to the state replaced the older responsibility to God, and religion proper became extremely individualistic (cf. Jefferson and his influence). The state image as the religious image, produced a religious attitude. Similar to the Greek for two centuries after Pericles; this analogy will not be pushed too far, but it is important.

This attitude was based on a local and individual historic sense, on one's roots in immediate time, rather than on the modern and abstract sense of reconstructed time. This is the essence of all sound religious attitudes, and it is quickly worn out in a scientific society in which abstract time replaces the concrete moment. This conflict will be traced historically with respect to the South.

It all sounds up in the air, but I'll make it plain in my essay.

And it will be considerably more bellicose than this summary makes it sound.

The second statement appeared February 8, 1931, in an article, "Mr. Tate Wants to Know-- Questions to Dr. C. B. Wilmer." Noting that we have a "scientific, practical, industrial religion, but it is not Christianity," Tate declared:

I have not been in a church in ten years in which the minister has not insinuated into his message the current doctrine of success as the religious test of the prosperous and relied on the humanitarian policy, now so popular, of seeing that the children of the poor keep their necks and teeth clean in the sight of man, who is now the Lord. . . . The plain facts are these: religion in our industrial communities is practically dead, and only the semblance of it endures in the form of shows and social service that the church puts on to keep from giving up the ghost altogether. Only in the more backward, rural

communities, which are communities in a real sense, and not simply economic organizations, does religion thrive.

In the essay, however, Tate structured his analysis into a metaphor and an image. Religion, he suggested, is "a complete and self-contained horse" but the "modern mind sees only half of the horse--that half which may become a dynamo, or an automobile, or any other horsepowered machine. . . . The religious mind, on the other hand, . . . wants the whole horse, and it will be satisfied with nothing less." The American view of religion is pragmatic, as Tate described it: it abstracts from the whole horse that half which works, and consequently, it is no religion at all because it predicts only success. A complete, realistic religion (the whole horse) must also take account of the failures; a mature religion "calls upon the traditional experience of evil which is the common lot of the race." From the metaphor of the horse, Tate turned to the "image"; again, his meaning emerges through a dichotomy, this one paralleling the half and whole horse. History, he noted, may be seen, and in the modern world generally is treated, as an abstract series. This is the Long View. Opposed is the Short View, which is temporal, the concrete series that has taken place in a very real time. In the Long View the differences, the distinctions, the particularities disappear or are subsumed under a single law. Thus the Long View is "the cosmopolitan destroyer of Tradition." Tate noted that as a result of this lack of differentiation, "there is no reason to prefer Christ to Adonis" since both myths are regarded as vegetation rites. What Tate appears to regret--and this is only to be inferred--is that since the Long View seems to be the contemporary dominant image of history, tradition--which he defined as something automatically operative,¹ something by which a religious attitude is to be defended--is threatened.

¹Fletcher objected to Tate's assertion that "tradition must be automatically operative," maintaining that the only thing to be so described was industrialism. In explanation of this characterization, Tate declared: "I simply mean

The relation between the horse metaphor and the history image to Southern literature is developed more explicitly in the latter half of the essay. Western religion in general, and American religion--which included the South's--in particular, vacillate "between a self-destroying naturalism and practicality, on the one hand, and a self-destroying mysticism, on the other." When rationality is employed to make the supernatural acceptable, the picture of nature as symbol and myth (the "inviolable whole") fades; "nature became simply a workable half" which "now thinks that it is a Whole of limitless practicability." The South might have avoided this result if it had been able to create a feudal religion for its feudal society; it failed, however, to "realize its genius in time," despite its non-aggressive, non-materialistic quality (though theoretically it was part of a Protestant society); attempting "to defend itself" on the North's political terms and suffering from an "inarticulate" religious impulse which "tried to encompass its destiny within the terms of

that the tradition must be concrete, must exist as a pattern of life in the mind, must in some sense survive in the specific details of living, before it can be a genuine tradition. A false tradition, for example, is Babbitt's kind--a resumé of books and principles which have no concrete connection with ordinary life. A tradition, in short, must be an image of concrete living which fills the minds of enough people to constitute a basis of action. In this sense the Southern tradition is dormant, and it is our purpose to make it active again. Our entire program is based on the assumed fact that the tradition is there to work on; otherwise we are only American liberals offering a new panacea and pretending to a concrete background that doesn't exist. Now what is our reason for doing this--that is, why are we loyal to this tradition? I say--and you object to it--that the mere living in a certain stream of tradition does not compel us to be more loyal to it: my essay therefore is an inquiry into the motives for defending the Southern tradition. . . ." (Letter to John Gould Fletcher, December 3, 1930.) For a fuller discussion of certain assumptions underlying Tate's analysis of religion see his "Fallacy of Humanism," in Critique of Humanism, edited by C. Hartley Grattan, pp. 131-66.

Protestantism" (a "non-agrarian and trading religion" in origin), the South unfortunately "separated from the North too late, and so lost its cause."

There is, Tate pointed out, a second unfortunate result from this anomalous position: the social structure of the South, which "depends on the economic structure" with the "economic conviction . . . the secular image of religion," had begun "to break down two generations after the Civil War." Yet, Tate implied, the South, as a "profoundly traditional European community," need not lose its individual character; it need not become a nineteenth-century New England, a parasitic, "abstract-minded, sharp-witted trading [society . . . living] economically on some agrarian class or country."

What course is possible? However "unrealistic and pretentious" the modern Southerner may regard it, he can attempt to "re-establish a private, self-contained, and essentially spiritual life" by political action; this Jeffersonian "formula"¹ (which Tate regarded as evidence of a "radical division between the religious, the contemplative, the qualitative . . . and the scientific, the natural, the practical") appears to be all that is left in the absence of "a sufficient faith in [the South's] own kind of God.

¹That Tate was not entirely happy about this substitution of a political "formula" (even though it was Jeffersonian) for religion may be inferred from his comments and the connotations of particular terms he chose: "The scientific mind always plays havoc with the spiritual life when it is not powerfully enlisted in its cause; it cannot be permitted to operate alone. It operated alone in Thomas Jefferson, and the form that it took in his mind may be reduced to a formula: The ends of man are sufficiently contained in his political destiny. Now the political destiny of men is the way they work, and the ends they hope to achieve collectively by the operation of mechanical laws. . . . The Modern Southerner inherits the Jeffersonian formula. This is only to say that he inherits a concrete and very unsatisfactory history. He can almost wish for his ease the Northern contempt for his kind of history; . . . for then he might do what the Northern industrialist has just about succeeded in doing--making a society out of abstractions." (Pp. 173-74, italics supplied)

"How may the Southerner take hold of his Tradition?" asked Tate. "The answer is by violence." Since the Southerner cannot fall back on his religion" and be a "borer from within" to "effect a secular revolution in his favor" he must elect "the sole alternative of boring from without," that is, resort to a political method, "active, . . . violent and revolutionary." In clarification Tate added: "Reaction is the most radical of programs; it aims at cutting away the overgrowth and getting back to the roots. A forward-looking radicalism is a contradiction; it aims at rearranging the foilage." The meaning of "by violence" was never spelled out in the essay, but in a letter to Fletcher, who had expressed perplexity at this enjoinder, Tate wrote:

Our motive for defending our tradition is not religious . . . since we lack that deep unity of mind which is brought about by centuries of participation in a mythical religion, the sole scheme of principles, the sole standard of truth that we can call upon is a conception of man in his political role. And a political faith is the most difficult of all, for it is essentially pragmatic and the act of faith must be individual based on individual reason; the religious motive for action is, as Kant would say, apodeictic, beyond question, and common--not individual. Since we lack this, we are agitators trying to make a political creed do the work of religion--and by religion I mean a profound conviction about the way life should be lived. . . . Of course, it may not be worthwhile to point out what the assumptions of our position fundamentally are, but at any rate that is what my essay tries to do. . . . To put the case more mildly, I merely tried . . . to show that our position must be extreme and committed to extreme action if it is not to stifle as an academic exercise.

[December 3, 1930]

"Remarks on the Southern Religion" offers no explicit comment on "Bible-belt" fundamentalism, no allusion to the Scopes trial, not even any specific evidence of the secularization of the religious impulse, yet all this is implicit. The essay is germane to the Southern Agrarian call-to-arms: it attacks the scientific, abstracting practical mind (which is identified with New England--i.e., the North); it defends the Southern tradition--humane, contemplative, and characterized by an ability to enjoy life.

But it is uniquely and unmistakably the kind of "analysis" appropriate to a poet whose more difficult passages have been defended on the ground that "poetry at its best is not intellectual clarity but a dark wood of symbol and metaphor."¹ The technique of "Remarks on the Southern Religion" is oblique, metaphorical; the intention, as Tate himself announced, is to have "one . . . think for oneself," to make "my fable" convincing by dressing it "in First Principles" since the appreciation of a myth² "is an art lost to the modern mind."

Although the Agrarians did not all subscribe to the same religious creed or set of dogmas, they agreed that the religious impulse was related to a respect for nature and the God of nature; a recognition of and an appreciation for the impenetrable ambiguities of the universe were central to their faith. "Religion is our submission to the general intention of a nature that is fairly inscrutable," they said in the Manifesto; "it is the sense of our rôle as creatures within it." That rôle, as Tate indicated, took cognizance of man's limitations; or as Lytle described it, a man who lives close to the land "recognizes the supremacy of nature and man's frailty. . . . An agrarian stepping across his limits will be lost."³ On another point they were in general agreement: that religion decays as it is humanized and becomes a mere expression of the impulse to do good. Ransom noted:

I believe there is possible no deep sense of beauty, no heroism of conduct, and no sublimity of religion, which is not informed by the humble sense of man's precarious position in the universe. . . . Service [the second American gospel] . . . busies itself with the heathen Chinese, with the Roman Catholic Mexican, with the "lower" classes in our society. Its motive is missionary. Its watchwords are such as Protestantism, Individualism, Democracy, . . .⁴

¹ A critical view represented by Henry Wells in Poet and Psychiatrist, Merrill Moore, M. D.: . . ., p. 49.

² "A myth," Tate said, "should be in conviction immediate, direct, overwhelming. . . ." (p. 156)

³ Pp. 209, 242.

⁴ Pp. 10-11.

Stark Young bewailed "the low ebb of religion in the South" which has been manifested in "the vast growth of the denominations formerly associated with the most bigoted and ignorant classes." For those who desire "a more modern religious thought" in organized churches, Young expressed the wish that there be "a return of whatever there was in the old that might lead to dignity, decent formality, and tolerant social balance. . . . my own feeling," he added, "is that I prefer a certain rude reality in the Southern drift toward religion, to the rude promotion of religiosity as an asset to restraint, production, and mental evasion."¹

* * *

The metaphorical qualities of Tate's commentary are balanced by an impressive array of statistics representing the realities of the South's economic existence from the 1830's to 1930 in the next essay, Herman Clarence Nixon's "Whither Southern Economy?" Recognizing that "there is no point in a war with destiny or the census returns," Nixon instead maintained (with evidence from the Statistical Abstract of the United States, census figures, a wide reading in the literature of economics, and personal observation and experience) that the South was still "offering a fairly even balance between rural and urban populations, between agriculture and industry," despite the fact that the rate of industrialization was increasing. Much of Southern manufacturing, he pointed out, was dependent upon agriculture--cotton-milling, tobacco-manufacturing, cottonseed oil for mill products and fertilizers. Up to 1930, Southern manufacturing, he noted, had not necessitated an excessive urbanization; "Southern commerce and banking [too] are largely built around agriculture." The distinctive staple crops--cotton, tobacco, rice, sugar--brought about a "mercantile contact," and cotton, of course, was so important that it became to the detriment of Southerners the "chief basis of their grasp of regional and world economics." As a result of the devastation wrought by the Civil War, the evolutionary progress the South had made toward crop

¹P. 341.

diversification, agricultural reform, and small-scale manufacturing was abruptly halted for a time, and "the most articulate agrarian group known to American history" was "jolted from power and status." Other unfortunate effects became apparent through the Reconstruction: there was "no effective check to an industrial dominance"; real-estate values were destroyed and a "consequent jungle of speculation, promotion, and 'booms' . . . tended to throw the Southern perspective toward a bourgeois materialism." Cotton, with the accompanying cottonseed oil mills and cotton manufacturing, became one means of economic salvation but simultaneously helped to fix on the South the tenant and "crop lien" system. Negroes, Nixon noted, have been primarily engaged in agriculture since slavery, and although Negro ownership of farms has been increasing more rapidly than white ownership, "Negro tenantry and exploiters of negro tenantry have been important factors in over-emphasizing a commercialized cotton production and delaying a wholesome agricultural diversification." Other factors in the Southern economic scene singled out in Nixon's descriptive analysis reveal the extensiveness of his research: the fact that the increase in the number of small farms was counteracted by a tendency for some of the best lands, especially in Texas with its large-scale farming, to "aggregate into larger holdings"; the fact that the boll weevil has stimulated "a healthy diversification" and "a more scientific cultivation of cotton"; the fact that the post-war industrial growth occurred in a "rawer" section and unfortunately with "revolutionary swiftness." The "New South"--"a cliché for the use of journalists and promoters"--came into vogue, Nixon observed, with the implication that "there had been an 'Old South' deserving of repudiation for its shortcomings." Exploiters of agrarian interests led them to a dependence on the narrow-minded Tom Watsons or Ben Tillmans, and the "New South" element treated the Farmers' Alliance, which lacked wise leadership, with little consideration. Yet in Nixon's view, the situation was not hopeless; speaking to Southerners in

"strategic or public position to take warning against the evils of a discriminatory encouragement of rapid industrialization in their section," he cited as evidence the comparative well-being of such nations as France and Denmark where industry is moderate and agriculture is important. Nixon did not argue that industry should be eliminated, but the role of the South, he felt, should be to clog the industrial process, to seek to "be different from the common trend": "The section's historic agrarianism offers a check and contrast to America's rush from colonial frontierism to a world-penetrating industrialism."¹ Passive indifference, in his opinion, will not withstand the realtors' campaigns; the "traditional leanings toward agrarianism" need to be "reinforced by a critical sophistication that is native to Southern soil." The South, from its experience with slavery, can "subordinate industrial processes to the status of slaves." What the South needs, Nixon concluded, is an articulate and constructive protest "against another conquest, a conquest of the spirit."

Other Agrarians (with the exception of Lytle) expressed similar views in their essays. Warren declared: "Possibly industrialism in the South can make some contribution to the negro's development, just as to the development of the section, but it will do so only if it grows under discipline and is absorbed into the terms of the life it meets."² Wade's representative Agrarian, Cousin Lucius, "conceded that no community could in his day be any longer purely agrarian."³ William Remington, the younger Southern individualist, created by Kline, "managed to commence his program realistically, with the candid admission that he would do better to make intelligent use of the fruits of material progress than to carry out any fairly complete renunciation of them. Motor-cars, talking pictures, the radio, laborsaving devices, possessed amazingly great potentialities for the extension and enrichment of the leisure one might devote to humane pursuits."⁴ And Stark Young, although not happy about the erection of factories in

¹P. 198.

²Pp. 255-56.

³P. 294. ⁴P. 320.

the South, suggested, "We can, if we only would, see industrialism as it spreads . . . , and study it, from the vantage ground of theory, criticism, and error elsewhere developed from experience and from longer observation. We can accept the machine, but create our own attitude toward it."¹

* * *

"Was it a brave jester," asked one literary critic, "who put 'the hind tit' as an answer to 'whither Southern economy'?" Andrew Nelson Lytle's panegyric to the yeoman farmer and his life before a machine economy had begun to change it to a mere imitation of urban existence was delightfully vivid and, he later said, deliberately overstated for literary effect. Avoiding the techniques of the social scientist, so effectively used by Nixon, Lytle with a novelist's pleasure in re-creating atmosphere and setting and with a loving selection of the felicitous detail argued that if any answer is to be given to "What can I do to be saved?" it "lies in a return to a society where agriculture is practiced by most of the people." With other Agrarians, Lytle felt that no culture can be "sound and healthy without a proper respect and proper regard for the soil." There is no escape in collectivization or mechanization. Beware of socialism, communism, or sovietism--"the three final stages industrialism must take"; beware of becoming a progressive farmer by mechanizing the farm and adopting scientific methods, he warned, for thus does the homespun agrarian abdicate to the powers that regard "industrialism [as] manifest destiny"; thus does he lose his freedom of action to the banks, insurance and "hydra-headed loan companies" because he is urged to think of farming for money to pay off his mortgage instead of farming as a way of life. "A farm is not a place to grow wealthy; it is a place to grow corn"; "... the progressive farmer ideal is a contradiction in terms. A stalk of cotton grows. It does not progress." Beware of the heresies of the false prophets, he

¹P. 355.

declared; the white small farmer had been misled after the Civil War by "his former leaders, the generals and colonels and lawyer-statesmen [who] moved into towns and cities and entered the industrial world"; he was being misled again by the enemy telling him that "he can bring the city ways of living to the country and that he will like it when it gets there"; but, Lytle cautioned, until prophets from the wilderness speak (not the false prophets from cities, promising riches and store clothes), "telling of a different sort of treasure"--

. . . it is best for him to keep to his ancient ways and leave the homilies of the tumble-bellied prophets to the city man who understands such things, for on the day when he attempts to follow the whitewash metaphysics of Progress, he will be worse off than the craftsman got to be when he threw his tools away.¹

Lytle's rendering of the yeoman farmer's life resulted in an idyllic picture (perhaps to be experienced again only on the printed page); intending to represent the "plainman" as type or symbol, Lytle described in detail his house; his yard; the daily chores of the family (and it is apparent from the detail that they were personally experienced or frequently observed activities)--milking, churning, feeding of stock, shucking of corn; the ritualistic character and symbolic aspects of the midday meal; the quantities and variety of foods; the play-parties and other folk entertainment--"ice cream socials, old-time singings like the Sacred Harp gatherings, political picnics, barbecues, and barn dances." Noting that the Agrarian South's culture--which he had just described in such fond detail--has been impoverished but not destroyed by the war and its aftermath, Lytle concluded that industrialism should be dreaded "like a pizen snake." Consider some effects, he suggested: The "good-road program" makes possible a demagoguery and is falsely advertised as a benefit to the farmer: true, it serves the large farmers and planting corporations, it brings much profit to "asphalt companies,

¹P. 206.

motor-car companies, oil and cement companies, engineers, contractors, bus lines, truck lines, and politicians"--but what about the small farmer who cannot afford to buy a truck? He pays the bills, his privacy is invaded by salesmen of all sorts who can now reach him more easily, and "besides being a shock to his mules' feet, it is difficult for the team to stand up on the road's hard, slick surface." Suppose the farmer is induced to trade his mules for a tractor? He forgets his piece of machinery will wear out and have to be replaced, only "the tractor cannot reproduce itself"--hence, a large sum of money must be laid aside. Mechanization breaks up the closeness of his family: his boys (except for one who will remain and run the farm) "can't hang around the place draining it of its substance"; his wife becomes "a drudge . . . an assistant to machines" instead of a "creator in a fixed culture" since he installed a Delcoplant which electrified everything; his daughters move to the city, no longer needed in the rural economy. To pay for all these "improvements" he must make money--and so he concentrates on a money crop, or two or three; yet, diversification of crops means multiplication of worries, if the crops are all overproduced. Misled into thinking he might "regulate or get ahead of nature" (he has bought highly productive seeds, artificial fertilizers, improved plows), he finds that "he is still unable to control the elements"; "he has no God to pray to to make it rain." As long as the Southern farmer lives in a divided world, he has been "rendered impotent in the defense of his natural economy and inherited life," Lytle concluded. His analogy is vivid and disheartening:

He has been turned into the runt pig in the sow's litter. Squeezed and tricked out of the best places at the side, he is forced to take the little hind tit for nourishment; and here, struggling between the sow's back legs, he has to work with every bit of his strength to keep it from being a dry hind one, and all because the suck of the others is so unreservedly gluttonous.¹

¹ P. 245.

Yet, the small farmer has one course of action which he may elect (and he need not wait for the conservative communities throughout the United States to unite on some common political program); "he must deny himself the articles the industrialists offer for sale." Like him, Southerners must, said Lytle,

Do what we did after the war and the Reconstruction: return to our looms, our handcrafts, our reproducing stock. Throw out the radio and take down the fiddle from the wall. Forsake the movies for the play-parties and the square dances. . . .

So long as the industrialist remains in the saddle there must be a money crop to pay him taxes, but let it occupy second place. . . . Let [the farmer] diversify, but diversify so that he may live rather than that he may grow rich. . . .

. . . . let those countrymen who have not gone so deeply in the money economy . . . hold to their agrarian fragments and bind them together, for reconstructed fragments are better than a strange newness which does not belong. It is our own and if we have to spit in the water-bucket to keep it our own, we had better do it.¹

When Allen Tate wrote Fletcher shortly after receiving their first published copy of I'll Take My Stand, he remarked:

I believe that Lytle's essay in some ways is the most powerful; it is absolutely uncompromising, it is perfectly concrete in its argument, and even though it may be considered a little impracticable by the faint-hearted, it remains always to be seen what practicability is. He directly wards off from us any charge of Southern - backward-looking; he is looking at the concrete, present thing as a starting point.

[November 4, 1930]

* * *

Appropriately named "The Briar Patch," Robert Penn Warren's essay on the South's unique problem--learning to live with a people who had once been slaves--represents a view that has been described as Southern: it includes the tacit assumptions that the standards by which to judge the achievements, needs, and desires of the Negro are those of the white man; that the most satisfactory modus vivendi for the two races is segregation with a continued effort to achieve

¹ Pp. 244-45.

the "equal" aspect of the Jim Crow policy established in the late nineteenth century. Within these limits, Warren's presentation was logically and convincingly argued. The Negro's low status, obviously unfair and unfortunate, was the result of a convergence of historical events: emancipated into "freedom," "the negro . . . did not know how to make a living, or, if he did, he did not know how to take thought for the morrow"; exploited for his political power, he got the worst kind of training "in corruption, oppression, and rancor" and thus he "sadly mortgaged his best immediate capital; . . . the confidence of the Southern white man with whom he had to live"; caught between the extremes of prejudices--a Northern view that the "immediate franchise carried with it a magic which would insure its success as a cure-all . . . for the negro's fate" and a Southern view that "would keep the negroes forever as a dead and inarticulate mass in the commonwealth--as hewers of wood and drawers of water"--the Negro's one hope for improvement, education, had little chance of being realized after the impoverishment of the South.

Warren's analysis of the Negro's situation was realistic in terms of conditions in the South in 1930. It was, however, a position not likely to please a "radical" (defined by Warren as one who wants the Negro to have the same opportunity to enjoy personal, social, or economic rights as the white man has) or even a liberal. Merely teaching the Negro to read and write, or offering him "little French and less Latin" and then assuming that he will be accepted and prosper "will be a repetition of the major fallacy in American education. . . ." Vocational education, he maintained with Booker T. Washington, is "the most urgent need"; nor is this "a piece of white man's snobbery [since] the principle applies equally well to the problem of white illiteracy" and since the "general matter of so-called higher education for the negro in the South" (even though "there is a need for negroes in the professions . . . just as there is opportunity if the negro combines a certain modicum of patience and unselfishness with his ability") "is a small factor in relation to the total

situation." That Warren was arguing against racial discrimination but not dealing frankly with the controversial issue of racial segregation should not be surprising in terms of time and place¹; his was a philosophical acceptance of segregation, at times implicit in his ambivalent position or in the tone of a statement, at others explicit in an unmistakable stand:

Many negroes undoubtedly possess a self-respect; in others something else, such as fatalism or humor, may partially serve its purpose in making the situation comfortable. But the more dynamic attitude is to be expected when, and only when, the negro is able to think of himself as the member of a group [and Warren's discussion clearly implies the Negro's own group] which can afford an outlet for any talent or energy he may possess.²

That Warren did not at this time envision a colorblind democracy is explicitly revealed in his conclusion:

Let the negro sit beneath his own vine and fig tree. The relation between the two [communities] will not immediately escape friction and difference, but there is no reason to despair of their fate. The chief problem for all alike is the restoration of society at large to a balance and security which the industrial regime is far from promising to achieve. Inter-racial conferences and the devices of organized philanthropy, in comparison with this major concern, are only palliatives that distract the South's attention from the main issue.³

And what is the main issue? To restore the South--and this includes the Negro--to agrarian life. The first step in the solution to discrimination is "the economic independence of the race"; but "to look forward to industrial progress as the factor which would make the Southern negro's economic independence possible . . . involves an exorbitant act of faith . . . not in the negro's capacity, but in the idea of industrialism"--a faith, Warren suggested, unjustified in terms of

¹As Warren himself stated in an interview in 1957, "In the essay I reckon I was trying to prove something. . . . On the objective side of things, there wasn't a power under heaven that could have changed segregation in 1929--the South wasn't ready for it, the North wasn't ready for it, the Negro wasn't. The Court, if I remember correctly, had just reaffirmed segregation, too." ("The Art of Fiction," p. 124.)

2P. 255.

3P. 264.

the view of the Negro as "an ideal scab," of his lower standard of living, of the conservative temper of Southerners toward most types of organization, including unions, and of the competition between the Negro and "poor white" for economic status. The hope for the Negro, Warren implied, was centered in the land, for the "Southern negro has always been a creature of the small town and farm, . . . there he has less the character of a 'problem' and more the status of a human being who is likely to find in agricultural and domestic pursuits the happiness that his good nature and easy ways incline him to."

That Warren had the most touchy subject of the symposium is suggested by the controversy that developed when his essay arrived in Nashville during the summer of 1930. Like Uncle Remus's Brer Rabbit who,--"bred and bawn in a briarpatch"--escaped from Tar Baby by being hurled into the middle of the thorny bushes, so Warren struggled through the problem of dealing concretely with the South's "massive experience" which he represented later as the necessity to achieve moral identity.¹ He himself admitted to a feeling of "emotional discomfort" about "The Briar Patch" which he regarded as a defense of segregation; "I changed my view very soon after I wrote it, not by getting out among the Yankees but by coming back home. I've eaten my words on 'Briar Patch' a long time back."²

Within the symposium there is no explicit evidence that any members of the Agrarian group differed significantly in a "liberal" or "radical" direction from Warren's point of view. The fact that most of them did not even discuss the Negro is worthy of note. Those contributors who did take cognizance of the race question in their essays would not have aroused the ire of Southern traditionalists. Ransom, for instance, in commenting on social relations in the ante-bellum South,

¹ Segregation (New York, 1956), p. 115.

² "The Art of Fiction," p. 124, and interview, September 4, 1957.

declared: "It was a kindly society, yet a realistic one; for it was a failure if it could not be said that people were for the most part in their right places. Slavery was a feature monstrous enough in theory, but, more often than not, humane in practice; and it is impossible to believe that its abolition alone could have effected any great revolution in society."¹ Owsley, who summarized "a peace unique in history" after Appomattox, noted:

For ten years the South . . . was turned over to the three millions of former slaves, some of whom could still remember the taste of human flesh and the bulk of them hardly three generations removed from cannibalism. These half-savage blacks were armed. . . . For ten years ex-slaves, led by carpetbaggers and scalawags, continued the pillages of war, . . . dragooning the Southern population, and visiting upon them the ultimate humiliations. . . . Hammond, Fitzhugh, John C. Calhoun, Chancellor Harper, Thomas R. Dew . . . [concluded] that the two races of different culture and color cannot live together on terms of equality. One will dominate or destroy the other. There was no middle ground. . . . For the Southern people there was no choice; the negro must be ruled, and the only way he could be controlled, they believed, was by some form of slavery. . . . Unfortunately for the South, the leaders of the North were able to borrow the language of the abolitionists and clothed the struggle in a moral garb. It was good politics, it was noble and convenient, to speak of it as a struggle for freedom when it was essentially a struggle for the balance of power.²

John Gould Fletcher suggested for improving American education "such institutions for training the negro as Tuskegee and the Hampton Institute, which are adapted to the capacity of that race and produce far healthier and happier specimens . . . than all the institutions for 'higher learning' that we can ever give them."³

* * *

John Donald Wade's sensitive vignette, "The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius," is more narration than essay.

¹P. 14.

²Pp. 62-63, 81-82, 84.

³P. 121.

Embodying Southern character and tradition while representing the disturbing changes that had come to a small town and the countryside in Georgia, this was "an account," Wade said, "(written with such philosophy as I can command and such affection as I can convey) of a man who lived . . . from 1850 to 1930. . . . It was an axiom in his old-fashioned head that only a complete integrity can offer a right basis for anything intended to mount high and keep high."¹ The point of view is Cousin Lucius's, from the beginning of the narrative when as a young child "he remembered all his life the feel of the hot sand on his young feet on that midsummer day" to a few short moments before his death when his son Edward heard first his father's "fine lusty shout that he remembered as designed especially for sunsets and clean dogwood blossoms," then saw the negro foreman Anthony frantically calling, "a sort of maniac between grief and terror, half weeping, half shouting, stooping, holding in his arms Cousin Lucius's limp body. 'Oh, Mas' Edward! Mas' Edward! Fo' God, I believe Mas' Lucius done dead!'" Wade's final paragraph wholly captures the spirit of the essay--regret, dignity, independence:

He was dead. And all who wish to think that he lived insignificantly and that the sum of what he was is negligible, are welcome to think so. And may God have mercy on their souls.²

Cousin Lucius was a man with genuine affection for his father; a man who worshipped "the sum total of [the] character of his wife" possessed with "serenity and splendor"; a teacher who had taken over an academy; a kind of farmer who introduced into the area the planting of peach trees, who could not be induced to accept an important teaching position in a neighboring city because "an instinct for the mastery of land was in his blood, and he knew few pleasures keener than that of roaming over his place. . . ." An urban life was anathema to him:

¹ Manuscript in the files of Donald Davidson.

² P. 30i.

A small daughter of his, one day, chattering . . . said a thing that made him cold with anger. She used the word 'city' as an adjective, and . . . so inclusively commendatory that he knew she implied that whatever was the opposite of 'city' was inclusively culpable.

Cousin Lucius could not accept the solution some of his friends proposed: to adopt the Northern way of life frankly or to encourage farming sections to band together into a national organization to fight the industrialists: "He doubted the wisdom of fierce force, anywhere, and he disliked the renunciation of individualism necessary to attain fierce force." Yet, he recognized the change in people and in the times; when his father had completed twenty-five years as superintendent of the Methodist Sunday school, the congregation, though beset with Hard Times, had given him a silver pitcher, but when fifty years had passed, although this generation was much better off, he was accorded no recognition. Cousin Lucius knew that "in spite of its bustling works, [the church] was bored upon from within by something that looked to him curiously like mortality. . . . He dimly felt that in its zeal to maintain itself as that symbol [of a craving . . . for integrity] . . . it had become simply the most available agent for [men's] philanthropies." The world was moving too fast--people "shooting fiercely about in automobiles, and Europe . . . trying to destroy itself in a great war--and . . . America . . . driven into the war, too . . . and people . . . not [reading] any more . . . because they were too busy going to the movies." Socialism, to Cousin Lucius, meant "the desire of the laboring classes for a more equable share of the world's goods"; "the laboring classes he knew were negro farm hands." His view of the economic status of the Negro is suggested in "It seemed to him that in all conscience they shared quite as fully as justice might demand in the scant dole of the world's goods handed down to their white overlords." Cousin Lucius, once called an old fogey because as a banker and a landowner he did not approve of loose credit for his community, came to be considered "a wise old bird."

He was wise in seeing the folly that a farm community surely enacts in attempting to live as if it were an industrial community. . . . he felt--when he heard people urging a universal acceptance of the industrial program--that the program was not suitable even for an industrial community if it was made up of human beings as he knew them.¹

But the cities grew "like mad . . . most of the old families he knew were moving off [the farms] and mortgage firms turned over the land to aliens, people . . . whose grandfathers never owned a slave nor planted a pomegranate." Cousin Lucius, an individualist until the end of his life, "thought that as a human being he was superior to any prospect whatever." He was a true Southern Agrarian of an earlier generation.

* * *

Southerners of the twentieth century sought to remain individualists too. "William Remington: A Study in Individualism" is Henry Blue Kline's statement not only of his attitude but of how he came to reach it²; to some extent it is also autobiographical: Remington's education and bent of mind were Kline's--he turned to the "useless" humanities, "finding that he loved literature and the arts and philosophy"; he was a "solitary idealist" with "a deeply rooted determination to live his life . . . on terms dictated by his own critical intelligence." Remington was unprepared "to earn a comfortable and morally painless living"³ after graduation, in part because

¹ P. 294.

² Letter to Donald Davidson, March 13, 1930.

³ At the time Kline was working on his essay, he had been looking for a teaching post, unsuccessfully. He wrote Davidson that he was considering an advertising job: "Advertising must sound like treachery to the principles you and I have in common, for it is the distinctive art of industrial progress; but if there's a chance to get into it I must jump at it; . . . In a way, I think a dose of advertising would be a good thing for me, for it would help me to a fuller understanding of just what Industrialism means, and so help me to a more intelligent criticism of it . . ." (Letter, March 13, 1930).

the environment in which he found himself put him in an "ambiguous, anomalous position," in part because "he recognized himself for an egoist, out of tune with the provisional harmonies of purely sensuous existence." He thought of becoming a teacher-philosopher but felt "curiously unfit for such a career." He would have liked to be a writer--Shakespeare was the brightest of all deities--but he knew he was no Shakespeare and even more important,

. . . creative artists were no longer the articulate archetypes of great ages describing in painting or music or poetry what they saw and heard and felt of the life about them; twentieth-century artists were solitary watchers who, finding nothing a man could keep hold on in the aimless procession of change going on all about them, were turned inward to a fruitless contemplation of their own beings.¹

Concluding that "creative activity was the most bootless of occupations," recognizing that "staging a one-man rebellion against a Kingdom of Whirl" was useless, William Remington decided he should seek "a closer communion with the ideal of life prevalent in his world"--so he tried the factory summers, for one a "pleasant steel mill" and for the others an "unpleasant self-styled model factory, . . . [where] the machines were 'almost human' their operators 'almost mechanical.'" With the impact of the depression, William, who had had merely an academic interest in the victims of industrialism, began to take "spirited exception" to the program of "buy--buy to the limit." When he realized that "economic optimism was to continue" as was the "progressivist negation of human worth and suppression of individual personality," William felt utterly isolated in a highly industrialized city; and determined "to wage an individual civil revolt against the established economic fetich," he decided to select carefully the products of a machine civilization, to "become a monkey wrench in the wheels of progress, a dissenter in word and deed from the dogmas of 'high saturation' and 'quick turnovers.'" He

¹ P. 312.

changed his environment, finding a place where "life was 'simpler,'" where there was "a social soil of just such a richness that he could take root and thrive therein," where "his own people . . . [provided] the richer realm of human relations by contact with a community life organized and conducted as a high and worthy end in itself." And William was not pessimistic; he saw "the beginning of a general counter-revolutionary movement against the further diffusion of material culture." He hoped that he and his friends, "a militant minority," would have a "leavening effect [on] the apathetic mass," on the "bovine-passive, median" men who "have always some latent power to become Minotaurs." That Kline had constructed his biographical-autobiographical piece with certain persuasive techniques in mind and that the essay is intentionally both a "group-attitude" and a highly personal expression are inferences to be drawn from his comments about his contribution in a letter to Davidson:

The principal alternations were made for tactical reasons. I thought it wise to make William admit that some of his sentiments were emotional rather than logical, in order that no hostile critic may accuse him of making bad inductions or uncritical analogies and metaphors. I've made him aware of the egoism Tate deplures, too; then have tried to show that egoism was forced on him by the adverse conditions of his environment. Then, when, in the concluding part (if I've accomplished my purpose), he is lifted out of his egoism by finding his place in a more congenial environment, the indictment of the earlier, industrialized order becomes so much the stronger.

[June 2, 1930]

* * *

"Not in Memoriam, but in Defense," Stark Young's essay, was considered by some of the contributors to be the feature of the symposium. Disavowing any intention of pleading for a return to the past,¹ Young nevertheless succeeded

¹"If anything is clear," Young declared, "it is that we can never go back, and neither this essay nor any intelligent person that I know in the South desires a literal restoration of the old Southern life, even if that were possible; dead days are gone, and if by some chance they should return, we should find them intolerable." I'll Take My Stand, p. 328.

in evoking the atmosphere of the ante-bellum Southern civilization, "once the fine flower of men's lives," not yet wholly dead. His intention, he declared, is "far less redolent of time's sweetness and the old grace. It is . . . a problem practical enough: the defense of what we have drawn not from theory but from an actual civilization, and believe it necessary to remember." What follows is first a summary of characteristics Southerners untainted by industrial values would wish to eliminate or forget: "Coolidge banalities, crudities, and arid White House silences, turned into virtues by his fortunate press"; infringements on minor decencies represented in pictures of Southern women endorsing face cream (the excuse that the money goes for a favorite charity still does not make the action less vulgar, Young felt); the tendency to exploit the South as an area for money-making or a relief from boredom, or a boasting about quantities or size. But the essay does not end with this negative emphasis; Young's intention is to conduct a campaign of defense, to avoid the "usual attitude too often met in Southerners": the "hautaurs, the supercilious, defensive high-headedness, the bursting bitterness, old tales, exclusive sentiment. . . ." The qualities with which Young is concerned can be found elsewhere, he agreed; they are being defended "not because they belong to the South but because the South belongs to them." He made clear at the outset that he is talking about a "certain life in the Old South, a life founded on land and the ownership of slaves." The "sturdy. . . fine yeomanry" and the "so-called poor whites" are mentioned but dismissed in terms of "our traditional Southern characteristics [which] derive from the landed class." "Provincialism proper," he wrote, "is a fine trait. It is akin to man's interest in his own center, which is . . . the source of his direction, health, and soul. . . . It is a state of mind or persuasion." In this sense Southerners are provincial; in this sense Young is unmistakably suggesting an identification with an earlier South: "You need not . . . live in the South, but you feel your roots are there. You love even the pain it has given

you." Through memory of one's roots, one can perhaps be sustained through life, he suggested:

No matter where you are, in any city or land or on the sea, and some old song suddenly heard again, or a childhood dish tasted, or some fragrance remembered from a garden once, or a voice or word, brings tears to your eyes because of its memory of some place, that place is your country. . . . I am not sure that one of the deep mysteries, one of the great . . . natural beauties of the heart does not lie in one's love for his own land.¹

Indeed, for Young the qualities which make a humane society are manners ("the mask of decency"), a family sense (which "followed our connection with the land" and was "induced by the Southern way of life that we came to mean by aristocratic"), "a certain fineness of feeling, an indefinable code for yourself and others, and a certain continuity of outlook, . . . a certain long responsibility for others; a habit of domination; a certain arbitrariness, . . . the possession of no little leisure." Recognizing that this conception of Southern aristocracy might not be considered "a good system," Young maintained nevertheless that the alternative elected in some Southern states, "where industrialism has already taken a foremost place, . . . [and] has made the word 'progressive' . . . a sickening epithet," was to be resisted:

It may be that the end of man's living is not mere raw Publicity, Success, Competition, Speed and Speedways, Progress, Donations, and Hot Water, all seen with a capital letter. There are also more fleeting and eternal things to be thought of; more grace, sweetness and time, more security in our instincts, and chance to follow our inmost nature, . . . We shall have to think that out for ourselves, and not be fed headlines as seals tallow balls, to keep up the performance.²

* * *

The Organic Character of the Book

The Agrarian symposium had come full circle. All of the essays, indeed, "tend to support a Southern way of life against . . . the American or prevailing way." John Crowe

¹Pp. 344-45.

²Pp. 358-59.

Ransom opened with the plea that the whole force of his generation in the South be marshalled behind the principles of the unreconstructed Southerner and "make them an ideal which the nation at large would have to reckon with"; Stark Young ended with the assertion that "the South changing must be the South still, remembering that for no thing can there be any completeness that is outside its own nature, and no thing for which there is any advance save in its own kind." Between these two essays the Agrarians touched on most aspects of culture--although their particular contribution might be specifically on provincialism, literature, history, education, religion, economics, or race. Henry Blue Kline's comment about the early version of the Manifesto is almost equally appropriate for the essays: "Accept one of the articles and you have in effect accepted them all, for they are different ways of saying the same thing--or better, they are offshoots from a single trunk."¹

Yet the Agrarian symposium achieves a unity by other means as well. For these Southerners, the world appeared in terms of dichotomies, or opposing principles which they characterized variously as art vs. science, religious humanism vs. materialism, agrarianism vs. industrialism. Consciously or subconsciously the Agrarians subsumed all aspects of their thought into this dualistic mode. By such paired alternatives they were able simultaneously to attack industrialism; science; a fragmented materialistic, chaotic world disintegrating as a result of its enslavement to specialization and its insistence on abstract thought. Thus, they defended agrarianism, the arts, stability, and an organic way of life experienced in its concrete aspects. For most of the Agrarians the central concern was aesthetic: "Neither the creation nor the understanding of works of art is possible in an industrial age except by some local and unlikely suspension of the industrial drive," they declared in their "Statement of Principles." For them, society, though composed of different classes, should be a

¹Letter to Donald Davidson, March 13, 1930.

unified whole: Davidson wrote with implicit approval of the South's eighteenth century social inheritance which was "actually a civilization, true and indigenous, . . . a culture [that] was sound and realistic," with "a fair balance of aristocratic and democratic elements. . . . The balance might be illustrated by pairings: . . . Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, John C. Calhoun and Andrew Johnson, Poe and Simms."¹ Lyle Lanier observed: "Individualism was natural in an agrarian society where there was considerable isolation and personal autonomy in the conduct of life, but such a spirit has no place in a machine age where the conditions make for an aggregate mental and emotional life."² Tate's analysis of religion and of Southern politics was predicated on two sets of dualisms: the view of the half and the whole horse and the Long and the Short View of History. H. C. Nixon remarked in his discussion on economics: "The human civilization now based on Southern agriculture is in no little peril, and industrial civilization under the capitalistic system does not offer a satisfying substitute in human values."³ Stark Young stated bluntly:

One of the odious traits of industrialism is that, even where there are men who know better, it defers to the mass, largely in order to exploit them. . . . It is remarkable how far this whine has carried among Southerners born to more noble terms of conduct and the spirit. In my opinion the South should be told flatly and coldly that . . . such moral canting, confidence, and whining belong to a village of cobblers and small traders, and are based on ignorance, commonness, and a sense of what will pay. Such a state may well be within our maudlin possibilities but it is not in our genuine tradition.⁴

The thorough-going opposition to science is suggested in Lytle's comparison:

Before going to the fields the farmer consults the signs. . . . Charms, signs, and omens are folk attempts to understand and predict natural phenomena. They are just as

¹I'll Take My Stand, p. 53.

²Ibid., p. 139.

³Ibid., p. 199.

⁴Ibid., p. 338.

useful and necessary to an agrarian economy as the same attempts which come from the chemist's laboratory in an industrial society, and far wiser, because they understand their inadequacy, while the hypotheses of science do not.¹

Such oppositions give the symposium the tone and spirit of a declaration of war. The very language--the connotations and metaphors--in which their commonly shared ideas are expressed serves to convey their determination to resist the foe. So the Twelve Southerners asked in their "Statement of Principles": "How far shall the South surrender its moral, social, and economic autonomy to the victorious principle of Union?" And later, they maintained: "Southerners have a filial duty to discharge to their own section. But their cause is precarious and they must seek alliances with sympathetic communities everywhere. . . . Shall the agrarian forces try to capture the Democratic party which historically is so closely affiliated with the defense of individualism, the small community, the state, the South?" "The rural life of America," Ransom said, "must be defended and the world made safe for farmers." Frequently the focus of the motif was transferred--quite understandably--to the North and industrialism, particularly when the context was the Civil War. Frank Owsley wrote of the "second war of conquest . . . calculated . . . to impose the Northern way of life and thought upon the South"; Andrew Lytle vigorously asserted: "This conflict [since 1865] is between the unnatural progeny of inventive genius and men. It is a war to the death between technology and the ordinary human functions of living."²

The more widely one reads in Agrarian literature, the more apparent becomes the function of the controlling or central technique of oppositions: the mechanistic vs. the organic parallels the industrial vs. the agrarian. The "natural" has been attacked by the "artificial." Although the organic metaphor did not appear in an explicit political context in

¹Ibid., p. 224.

²Ibid., pp. 63, 202. Italics supplied.

the symposium (undoubtedly the fact that there was no essay specifically devoted to this area explains the lack of particular application), the Jeffersonian assumption--i.e., that the health of a state depends upon the predominance of an agrarian economy, that the body politic thrives when men live close to the land and sickens or becomes diseased when it festers from the sores of industrialism--is implicit in the Twelve Southerners' defense of an agrarian way of life.

Ransom embedded the feeling of an individual's identification with a particular locale in such a metaphor; if society is to remain healthy, it too, he suggested, must nourish such roots:

It [nostalgia] is the complaint of human nature in its vegetative aspect, when it is plucked up by the roots from the place of its origin and transplanted in foreign soil, or even left dangling in the air. And it must be nothing else but nostalgia, the instinctive objection to being transplanted, that chiefly prevents the deracination of human communities and their geographical dispersion as the casualties of an insatiable wanderlust.¹

But with the proper respect, a fine relationship between man and nature is possible. The Agrarian "concludes a truce with nature, and he and nature seem to live on terms of mutual respect and amity, and his loving arts, religions, and philosophies come spontaneously into being"; but "ambitious men fight against nature": they are "scientists burrowing in their cells" and "industrial men . . . who go out and trouble the earth." Nature, it is implied in other essays, creates and sustains qualities of enjoyment and concomitants of civilization; but the artificial, mechanized program, subsumed under the labels "industrialism" or "progressivism," destroys. The amassing of negatively charged terms is effectively vivid in the function of persuasion: It has a "malignant meaning"; it uses "the latest scientific paraphernalia"; it is "an insidious spirit . . . generally fatal to establishments, . . . a menial, a principle of boundless aggression against nature; . . . it means the dehumanization of [the farmer's] life"; its technique

¹Ibid., p. 6.

of mass-production brings about "a gradual corruption of integrity and good taste"; "new South doctrines [are] subversive of its native genius"; "megapolitan agglomerations, which make a great ado about art, are actually sterile on the creative side"; "the brassy methods of tradesmen [are still found] a little uncouth"; banks and insurance companies, the absentee landlords of capitalism, can never establish a social relationship: "What can an abstract corporation . . . whose occupation is statistics and whose faro-bank can never lose, know of a farmer's life?" If Southerners wish to permit industrialism to some extent, Young observed, they should "look sharp to the doctrines they accept, and to the half-unconscious rot, evolved from a dissatisfied eager and short-sighted state of society," for, Davidson would add, the rôle of objects of science and of the social trends they have caused "is mainly Satanic": "Their influence on humanity is to de-humanize, to emphasize utilitarian ends, to exalt abstraction over particularity and uniformity over variety." From the invasion of "foreign industry," from the "industrial drive," men have paid "the penalty in satiety and aimlessness," they suffer from a "decay of sensibility," and they find their habitations artificial, their human energies enslaved.¹

The organic metaphor, by contrast, served as the central controlling image in Agrarian philosophy. In general, the contributors to the symposium selected the static aspect of the metaphor (in contrast to the dynamic, which focuses on the adaptiveness of an institution or a state²) and emphasized

¹Phrases are quoted from I'll Take My Stand. Italics supplied.

²Both the dynamic and the static aspects are expressed in language appropriate to a biological organism. The dynamic metaphor emphasizes changing characteristics, admits the possibility of internal and external changes through growth and development, even of modification of the very structure of the state or society itself. The organic metaphor in its static sense tends to focus on preserving what is (or was). Both renderings of the organic metaphor have validity; the significant question is which is selected, and why.

those elements of a society or tradition which conserve, those which function to keep the organism a unity, which enable the parts to preserve the whole; adaptation or change in the organism could and should come, they felt, but only if it does not change the essential character of the organism--in this case, the "agrarian, conservative, anti-industrial," traditional South. In speaking of the "tradition of the soil . . . in the Southern colonies," Cwsley noted that most of the settlers were "of the yeomanry . . . from rural England" for whom "thoughts, words, ideas, concepts, life itself, grew from the soil." This was, in essence, a definition of what the Agrarians meant by an "organic way of life," and it was this way of life they wished to conserve. In contrast, "the typical 'radical' mind . . . demands that things be done at once, . . . tries to force nature, . . . wants to tear up by the roots."¹ "The system of society which developed in the South . . . was close to the soil . . . It might be crude or genteel, but it everywhere was fundamentally alike and natural." This "natural" way of living could and ought to be supported by a proper education, defined by Fletcher as an achievement of "character, personality, gentlemanliness in order to make our lives an art and to bring our souls into relation with the whole scheme of things, which is the divine nature."²

¹ Cwsley was describing at this point William Lloyd Garrison and his "ruthless war upon slavery and the slaveholder." The editor of the Liberator, he declared, "knew no moderation . . . had no balance or sense of consequence." But to describe Cwsley, or the other Agrarians as fearful of change on the basis of such comments would be, he felt, a mistake. In a marginal note on a manuscript, he stated: "No fear of change if it is a natural change--an organic growth such as nature provides in a tree." (Enclosure in a letter to Virginia Rock, May 30, 1956.)

² The system of education prevailing in American primary and secondary schools, Fletcher noted, exemplifies standardized mass production: "There are the same recitations of memorized parroted facts; . . . the same unlimited range of disconnected subjects, all open as possible 'credits,' and the same lack of an organic curriculum and of close contact between the minds of the pupils and that of the teacher." ("Education, Past and Present," p. 116.)

This phrase--"to bring our souls into relation with the whole scheme of things, which is the divine nature"--embodies another appeal of the Agrarian symposium: the persuasiveness of religion. As men of letters and as Southerners, these Agrarians desired a society which was predicated on a religious myth, for only in such a society, they felt, would something of the impenetrable ambiguities of the universe, something of the inscrutability and mystery of nature and of God be acknowledged. That theirs was a "conservative" religion is revealed not only in their assumptions and explicit statements about the nature of man and of God but also in the imagery, the allusions, the overtones and undertones which reinforced their dualistic viewpoint. "Religion and the arts," they believed, "are founded on right relations of man-to-nature" and nature, as they experienced it "is fairly inscrutable . . . mysterious . . . contingent." "Salvation," they asserted, "is hardly to be encountered on [the] road" mapped out by the "apologists of industrialism" who "would cure the poverty of the contemporary spirit by hiring experts to instruct it in spite of itself in the historic culture."¹ The North, symbol of commercialism, industrialism, materialism, was effectively attacked through a Biblical allusion: "The North still sits in Pharisaical judgment upon the South, beating its chest and thanking-Thee-O-Lord-that-I-am-not-as-others and imposing its philosophy of living and life upon the South."² If Southerners are to withstand realtors' campaigns, they must "say affirmatively that the South must cultivate its provincial soul and not sell it for a mess of industrial pottage."³ Citizens who ask "What can I do to be saved?" will not find the answer from "false prophets [who] come from

¹"A Statement of Principles," pp. xiv, xv. Italics supplied.

²Frank Owsley, "The Irrepressible Conflict," p. 67. Italics supplied.

³H. C. Nixon, "Whither Southern Economy?", p. 199. Italics supplied.

cities, promising riches and store clothes." And "if the day ever comes" when the "whitewash metaphysics of Progress" is accepted, "the world will see a new Lazarus, but one so miserable that no dog will lend sympathy enough to lick the fly dung from his sores." The allusive metaphor is a rich one and is extended to drive home an Agrarian thesis:

Lazarus at least groveled at the foot of the rich man's table, but the new Lazarus will not have this distinction. One cannot sit at the board of an insurance company, nor hear the workings of its gargantuan appetite whetting itself on its own digestive processes.¹

The religion of industrialism is also attacked in vivid imagery. Predicated on a faith in science which abstracts, which assumes that man can control nature through his power of reason, the religion of the Machine Age decays into the philanthropic impulse. Lytle warned, "Turn away from the liberal capons who fill the pulpits as preachers. Seek a priesthood that may manifest the will and intelligence to renounce science and search out the Word in the authorities."²

In his essay "Aspects of the Southern Philosophy" Richard Weaver, author of Ideas Have Consequences, depicts the relationship of the Southerner's opposition to analysis and his conservative religion; Weaver's description is clearly applicable to the Agrarians' anti-industrialism:

The form in which the messages of the great religions come . . . is seldom if ever analytical. . . . if one tries to take them apart piece by piece the genius of the message vanishes. . . . The evidence seems overwhelming that synthesis is the way of science and business. . . . The typical Southerner is an authentically religious being if one means by religion not a neat set of moralities but a deep and even frightening intuition of man's radical dependence in this world. That awareness is something which has to be achieved immediately rather than mediately, and I suggest that the Southerner's practice of viewing the world in this way is the postulate of all his thinking, and that it causes him to demur at the analysis of life, or love, or

¹A. N. Lytle, "The Hind Tit," pp. 203, 206. Italics supplied.

²Ibid., p. 244.

war, or any other large subject. What he wants is a picture of it, in which the whole is somehow greater than the analyzable parts.¹

Or, according to one of the Agrarians, "abstraction is the death of religion no less than the death of anything else."²

Perhaps it is not too surprising to find a general concurrence on subjects to which specific essays were devoted, but that there was also a striking core of unanimity on an area for which there was no specific essay--political theory--is further evidence of the "group" character of the symposium.

In general, the Agrarians might be characterized as "constitutional democrats"; they were also obviously Jeffersonian in their politico-economic orientation. Like Jefferson, they wished for a government whose policies were determined by and for a citizenry composed largely of yeoman farmers. They feared overcentralization and emphasized the importance of local government, protection of minority rights against majority rule, and the preservation of sectional individuality from national standardization. They were constitutionalists; like Jefferson they maintained that the States, on the basis of powers granted them by the Constitution, ought to resist any encroachment from the federal government. They did not, however, echo Jefferson's confidence in human character, or in man's ability to improve society through his use of reason. The fear several of the Agrarians expressed of "plutocracy," or majority rule, was predicated on their observation of the standardizing effects of industrialism: the opinions and actions of men could be molded en masse. Although some members of the group expressed a preference for an aristocratic society, to call the group anti-democratic is to ignore certain aspects of their thought. Admittedly, they feared a democracy, but it was a "democracy no longer restrained by constitutional principles, . . . voting without regard for principles or

¹ In Southern Renaissance, pp. 15-16.

² Allen Tate, "Remarks on the Southern Religion," p. 156.

consideration of minority rights, and governing strictly in the interest of the numerical majority."¹ It was the alliance between democracy and industrialism, and its effects on culture which disturbed the Agrarians, not the democratic form of government itself:

Democracy did not, after all, disturb society unduly. It was a slow growth, it had some continuity with the past, and in an agrarian country like pre-Civil War America it permitted and favored a balanced life. Industrialism came suddenly and marched swiftly. It left a tremendous gap. Only as democracy becomes allied with industrialism can it be considered really dangerous, as when in the United States, it becomes politically and socially impotent; or, as in the extreme democracy of the Soviets, where, converted into equalitarianism within class limits, it threatens the existence of man's humanity.²

They were supporters of a status quo--that is, of a tradition-based society manifesting a respect for religion, family, and history--but they were not ipso facto opposed to change. They tended to emphasize "the stability of an ordered life" but would not reject changes which came gradually or which represented a continuity with the past. Particularly in the sphere of economics did this concern for continuity appear: "It is questionable policy to consider scrapping old-fashioned economic ways for new-fashioned ways that are already in disrepute," wrote Nixon. "If there is any law of progress, it involves in part a carry-over of the gains of the past."³ And Wade observed, "All that [Cousin Lucius] insisted on was that the expansion of his community be an ordered response to actual demands--not a response so violently stimulated to meet artificial demands that it created new demands faster than it could satisfy old ones."⁴

The Southern concern for political decentralization

¹ Frank Owsley, letter to Virginia Rock, May 30, 1956.

² Davidson, "A Mirror for Artists," p. 49.

³ "Whither Southern Economy?", pp. 177-78.

⁴ "The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius," pp. 292-93.

is specifically traced to Jefferson. Frank Owsley noted that historically "the fundamental principles of political philosophy" for the Northern and Southern societies were defined by Hamilton and Jefferson--"The one was extreme centralization, the other extreme decentralization; the one was nationalistic and the other provincial; the first was called Federalism, the other State Rights."¹ Jefferson's vision was of "a laissez-faire society, with only enough government to prevent men from injuring one another. . . . It took cognizance of the fundamental difference between the agrarian South and West . . . and the commercial and growing industrial system of the East.". Freedom, economic and social, was the end; the price to be paid; "a neat and orderly system of government"² might not be achieved. At the time the symposium was published a support of "States Rights" appeared to be part of the Agrarian philosophy. In an historical context Owsley described this doctrine as "the only safe bulwark against Northern exploitation and encroachment." And on the level of local self-government, decentralization was the means by which one region could protect itself from the encroachment of others.³ These two principles--states rights and local self-determination--were the bifurcated weapon for Agrarian attacks on "an

¹"The Irrepressible Conflict," p. 85. Jefferson's concern over the growing power of the federal government was expressed in a letter to W. B. Giles in 1825: "I see . . . with the deepest affliction, the rapid strides with which the federal branch of our government is advancing towards the usurpation of all the rights reserved to the States, and the consolidation in itself of all powers, foreign and domestic; . . .
". . . the States should be watchful to note every material usurpation on their rights; to denounce them as they occur in the most preemptory terms; to protest against them as wrongs to which our present submission shall be considered, not as acknowledgments or precedents of rights, but as a temporary yielding to the lesser evil, until their accumulation shall outweigh that of separation. . . ." (Thomas Jefferson on Democracy, comp. Saul K. Padover [New York, 1953], pp. 54-55.)

²"The Irrepressible Conflict," pp. 38-89.

³Ibid., pp. 87-88.

overbearing and unsympathetic national government" and the mass-produced, standardized products of industrialism, whatever the manifestation--as popular art, as an urban, unindividualized manner of living, as a distribution of ready-made ideas.

Although the Agrarians did not, in the symposium itself, specifically identify any of their political views with Calhoun, it is apparent to anyone well acquainted with the South Carolinian's Disquisition on Government, Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States, and certain of his Senate addresses that these Southern men of letters and social scientists were not only aware of his theory of the concurrent majority as a support for his strong sectional bias, for instance, but in an oblique way indebted to him.¹

¹ Andrew Lytle had read widely in Calhoun as a background for his Bedford Forrest biography on which he was working when I'll Take My Stand was being planned and written. And at the Fugitives' Reunion Tate added that they had been called "disciples of Calhoun" to Ransom's description of the group as representing "decidedly the Jeffersonian" economy and political view. (Fugitives' Reunion, p. 207.) August C. Spain in The Political Theory of John C. Calhoun (New York, 1951) finds certain similarities between the ideas of Calhoun and those expressed by the Twelve Southerners (see pp. 270-275).

Calhoun's explication of the principle of the concurrent majority is a foreshadowing of the Agrarian defense of regional political grouping: "But a government based upon the principle of the concurring majority, where each great interest possesses within itself the means of self-protection, which ultimately requires the mutual consent of all the parts, necessarily causes that unanimity in council, and ardent attachment of all the parts to the whole, which give an irresistible energy to a government so constituted." ("On the Revenue Collection Bill," February 15, 1833, The Works of John C. Calhoun, ed. Richard Crallé [New York, 1855], II, 257.)

And but for the political context, Calhoun's defense of his sectional allegiance might have been Davidson's or Owsley's or Young's: "Strong as is my attachment to the Union, my attachment to liberty and the safety of the section where Providence has cast my lot is still stronger; not that I am sectional in my feelings, for I have ever looked with deep interest, supported my interest of my section, at the expense of any other. . . . I hold it to be true, in a federal system like ours, that the section or portion of the Union which permits encroachment on its constitutional rights when it can prevent it, is not much less guilty than that which perpetuates the wrong." (Oregon Territory Bill, August 12, 1849, Works, IV, 531.)

Although I'll Take My Stand was not intended as a blueprint on economics and political science,¹ and although there were no specific programs offered for achieving Agrarian aims, occasionally there was a hint that some sort of "social planning" might be necessary. Lanier was ~~most~~ explicit in acknowledging the need for something more than a laissez-faire political philosophy or a decentralized government if the "capitalistic industrial program" was to be successfully renounced. The answer, he believed, lay not in scrapping industrial technology--rather, further mechanization of industry should be encouraged in order to free more men from its processes--but in using "all possible means" to induce the large surplus of chronically unemployed . . . to return to agriculture." This, Lanier tacitly admitted cannot be done by a governmental hands-off policy. The project, he wrote, "demands far-sighted 'social engineering'" since "agriculture is in a discredited state" and has been discriminated against "in the form of government subsidization of industry." The forms of the discrimination singled out by Lanier (as Southerners from ante-bellum days on have done) was the tariff which has all but gutted beyond repair the pursuit which lies at the base of every social organization" and government price support of "a thousand and one gadgets which issue from the machines." The conclusion to be inferred is that some government action on the national level would be necessary: "If there exists any effective social and political intelligence in the country it might profitably be mobilized for the conduction of a specific program of rehabilitation of the agrarian economy and the 'old individualism' associated with it."² H. C. Nixon noted that "readjustments are necessary to give the Southern farmers and other farmers a square deal in the fields of tariffs and taxation. . . . Perhaps something of a crusade is required to

¹Letter to Virginia Rock, May 30, 1956.

²"A Critique of the Philosophy of Progress," pp. 151-53. Italics supplied.

secure an equable public treatment as between industry and agriculture in the South."¹

That these Agrarians were conservatives is clear.² To discuss the fact at any length is to belabor the obvious. In their desire to preserve such qualities as a respect for family, a stratified society, and a religion which encourages belief in myths; in their view of human nature as inherently corrupt and man as limited, therefore in need of external controls through the church, social mores, traditions and laws; in their negative critique of progress, materialism, and the uncritical acceptance of the abstractions of science; in their suspicion of changes effected too rapidly; in their plea for

¹"Whither Southern Economy?", p. 195.

²Dr. Edwir. Mims' characterization of the conservative Southerner after the Civil War includes several convictions and attitudes which have carried over into the thought of twentieth-century defenders of a "Southern way of life"; "The conservative Southerner," Mims wrote, "whether he was the fiery Bourbon or the more balanced protagonist of the old order, failed to understand the meaning of defeat. He interpreted the victory in the North as the triumph of brute force--sheer material prosperity--and comforted himself with the thought that many of the noblest causes had gone down in defeat. He threshed over the arguments of Calhoun with regard to the Constitution of 1787, and maintained that secession was still the right of every sovereign state. He still . . . tried by legislation to continue slavery in spirit, if not in name. He saw no hope for the Negro, and looked for his speedy deterioration under freedom. Compelled by forces of circumstances to acknowledge the supremacy of the Federal Government, he was still dominated by the ideas of separation. . . . He magnified the life before the war as the most glorious in the history of the world. He saw none of its defects; he resented criticism, either by Northerners or by his own people. . . . The watchwords of modern life were so many red flags to him--science the enemy of religion, German philosophy of the Transcendental period a denial of the depravity of man, democracy the product of French infidelity and of false humanitarianism, industrial prosperity the inveterate foe of refinement and culture. . . . He went to work with a stubborn and unconquered spirit, with the idea that some time in the future all the principles for which the South had stood would triumph. (The Advancing South, pp. 1-3.) Certain elements of this unreconstructed conservative Southerner appeared in the utterances of some of the Agrarians.

continuity and stability and their questioning of popular government (majority rule without proper regard for minority rights), the Agrarians reflect a conservative temper that can be traced back to John Taylor, Calhoun, George Fitzhugh and William Harper, among others. And they themselves affixed the label of "conservative" to views which they endorsed or to the society they wished to preserve. Ransom spoke of the fact that the Southerner must know "his antique conservatism does not exert any great influence against the American progressivist doctrine" and that the principle to which the Southerner would hope the Democratic party can be held may be defined as "agrarian, conservative, anti-industrial."¹ Davidson suggested that the artist, sharing in the general concern about the conditions of life, "must learn to understand and must try to restore and preserve a social economy [*i.e.*, agrarian]." He will be led almost inevitably by both strategy and conviction "to the sections of America that are provincial, conservative, agrarian."² Warren described a "conservative temper which . . . distrust[s] . . . most types of organization" and defined it further as "not . . . a simple economic conservatism which would find a congenial supplement in capitalistic theory" but one of "a more philosophical inflection which subjects the organization of capital to the same skeptical regard."³

As the Agrarians themselves depicted it conservatism was not fairly represented as "reactionary" or mere "stand-pattism." Their organicism indicates that changes of a certain nature would be acceptable if they came gradually and developed in continuity with traditions of the past. But change, for the sake of change, represented no true progress, they felt. John Gould Fletcher's definition of "conservatism" in the context of education would be relevant also as a political statement: "The educational system . . . follows the sound

¹"Reconstructed but Unregenerate," pp. 3, 13.

²"A Mirror for Artists," p. 52. Italics supplied.

³"The Briar Patch," pp. 257-58.

conservative principle which also exists in all other human affairs, that so long as a system is producing good results, it is useless to meddle or tinker further with it."¹ Lyle Lanier declared that his proposal for "a specific program of rehabilitation of the agrarian economy and the 'old individualism' associated with it" was "not conceived in a spirit of pathological regression to the past, stimulated by repugnance toward contemporary conditions"; rather, "it is the definition of a concrete social aim."² The Agrarians looked to the past primarily because industry, said Nixon, was "facing a giant break-down" and "industrial civilization under the capitalistic system does not offer a satisfying substitute in human values." Under these circumstances, "Speed in a dangerous direction or in a vicious circle is no virtue, and the South can well afford to be backward in a movement toward an internal collapse or an external collision."³ The "great, immediate problem," Young concluded, was "to arrive . . . at some conception of the end of living, the civilization, that will belong to the South." Here there is "a mystery," the mystery of change "whose god is Mutability." In Edmund Spenser Young found what might be described as the perfect representation of the Agrarian attitude toward the tension between stability and change; Spenser, he noted, wrote that "all things hate steadfastness and are changed, and yet, being rightly weighed",

They are not changed from their first estate;
But by their change their being do dilate:
And turning to themselves at length again,
Do work their own perfection so by fate.
Then over them change doth not rule and reign,
But they rule over change and do themselves maintain.⁴

Donald Davidson's answer to the criticism of Nashville

¹"Education, Past and Present," p. 94.

²"A Critique of the Philosophy of Progress," p. 153.

³"Whither Southern Economy?", pp. 196, 198, 199.

⁴"Not in Memoriam but in Defense," p. 359.

Tennessean editor James I. Finney that the symposium was weakened by its lack of a political essay and specific proposals for political action is obviously justified although a more broadly philosophical than a programmatic approach must be taken to the book. Writing Finney about a week before the symposium was released for public sale, Davidson declared:

There is hardly a single [essay] which doesn't have strong political implications or even actual political suggestions, --sometimes very concrete ones.

It is true that we don't (at present) have an actual candidate for some office, and a platform for him to stand on. . . . It would be fairer to say, I think, that we represent principles looking for a party, and for men. . . . with our public political sense so degraded and lost that the formation of a party is immediately out of the question, isn't it more sensible, by and large, to set the principles to work? The great difficulty now is to get people conscious of the issues at all, even when they are real issues; it will take a long time for ideas to work. But nothing in the end is quite so powerful as ideas--. . .¹

Like the state and the society the Agrarians wished to see re-established, I'll Take My Stand was an organic whole. Allen Tate's delight in seeing its continuity is evidence of its success as a group "protest against . . . industrialism and a humanistic proclamation"²; to John Gould Fletcher he wrote:

Isn't it remarkable, and remarkable testimony to the power of the Southern idea, all the way from the coast to Arkansas, that every essay dovetails with the others, and that all are the same essay really in different terms. There are disagreements, but in the main objectives there is no contradiction.

[November 4, 1930]

¹Letter to James I. Finney, November 6, 1930.

²Lyle Lanier, letter to Virginia Rock, July 18, 1956.

CHAPTER VII

REACTIONS, STRATEGIES, AND REPERCUSSIONS

Reviews of I'll Take My Stand

In 1943 Donald Davidson wrote that I'll Take My Stand "has this unique distinction: it has been refuted by more people who have never read it--or even seen a copy--than any other book in American history."¹ The number and character of the reviews and notices accorded the symposium late in 1930 and through half of 1931 partially substantiate this assertion, although it is true that some newspapers gave only a perfunctory announcement of its publication. But many newspapers of Southern cities,² large and small, were generous in their allotment of space and the Northern and midwestern press³ was not unfriendly. Indeed, one of the most impudent treatments came

¹"The 'Mystery' of the Agrarians," p. 6.

²It is impossible to list all the Southern papers that carried reviews; I saw more than twenty-five, including notices or commentaries from the Atlanta Constitution, the Macon Telegraph, the Nashville Tennessean, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, the Knoxville News-Sentinel, the Richmond Times-Dispatch, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Louisville Courier-Journal, the Baltimore Evening Sun, and the Clarkesville, Tennessee, Leaf Chronicle.

³Northern and Midwestern newspapers reviewing the symposium were scattered over a large geographical area: in addition to notices in five New York papers (the Times, the Herald-Tribune, the Sun, the Telegram, and the Morning World), comments appeared in the Buffalo News, the Detroit Free Press, the Jackson, Michigan, Tribune, the Hartford, Connecticut, Courant, the Boston Transcript, the Chicago Post, the Omaha World Herald, and the Des Moines Register.

from a Georgia newspaper, the Macon Telegraph, while the Nation reviewer's outspoken criticisms of the agrarian position matched in frankness by those of the renegade Southerner, H. L. Mencken.

To examine the reviews, then, in terms of Northern vs. Southern will prove unrewarding. Far more revealing of the character of the symposium's reception is a descriptive classification of the various negative and positive critiques. Like the Agrarians, reviewers found an attack more exciting and absorbing than a defense. Friendly critics spoke frequently of the style or spirit of the Agrarian position as "radical," "passionate," "committed," "conservative and rational," a "call to arms" worthy of consideration. But reviewers who either emotionally or intellectually were unable to accept the Agrarian creed found it a "nostalgic cult," and the twelve Southerners "unreconstructed rebels," "typewriter agrarians," "Young Confederates" who might best be described as a "socially reactionary band," "tower-of-ivory agrarians." Their position was "belated and quaint," an attempt to "return to a dream, and to a shadow of a dream." The nature of the arguments from both camps begins to become apparent. For the defenders of the Agrarians or for those who found commendable elements in their views, the strength of their position lay in fiery attacks on industrialism, progress, or science; in the obvious superiority of the way of life they were supporting and seeking to restore; in the hope they implied of effecting a spiritual renaissance which would save the South. John Temple Graves II of the Birmingham Age-Herald, whom Davidson had singled out as the journalist offering the Agrarians the most consistent editorial support, wrote in his "This Morning" column for February 18, 1931:

If you are sick of being shocked by H. L. Mencken and would rather be shocked by your own flesh and blood; if you are tired of some of the platitudes of "progress"; if you have "cooperated" until your bones begin to creak a bit; if you feel lost at times in a labyrinth whose exits and entrances are all too collective; if you sometimes suffer immortal

longings for a dignity and peace which modern days deny you; . . . if you want to be refreshed with a philosophy so ancient that it may be ultra-modern too . . . --then you should read "I'll Take My Stand," the recently published volume in which 12 brilliant Southerners, six of them from Vanderbilt University unfurl against the modern industrial stampede the flags of the South and its agrarian tradition.

In the Saturday Review of Literature, even W. S. Knickerbocker, who usually did not fully endorse the Agrarians' views, called I'll Take My Stand the "most audacious book ever written by Southerners," "the most challenging book published in the United States since George's Progress and Poverty":

Important as a vigorous declaration of social protest, it is even more important as a prescription for current economic ills. Its earnestness, intelligent treatment of profound questions, its note of determined conviction touched with emotional zeal, will make it an exciting experience for Southerners and non-Southerners alike.¹

The tone and character of Richmond Times-Dispatch Allen Cleaton's summary of the Twelve Southerners' position suggest a friendliness to their point of view:

In essays which pursue the complexities of philosophy, art, politics, and religion, the authors not only question but deny absolutely the claims of the progressivist or American philosophy, and they hold up as an example for us a figure that has grown sadly unpopular nowadays--the agrarian Southerner, simple in his demands and joys, unhurried, honest, with time to be courteous, living close to the soil, away from the noise and dirt, the speed and mechanized pleasures of the city. . . . Instead of the movies, with the inevitable triumph of cheapness, or the radio which hounds him forever to buy, he has the pleasures of the husking bee, the dance with real violins. And he finds time to help a neighbor with the harvesting, or a sick animal, unaware of the goading, selfish ambitions which drive his city brother into despair, neutroticism or an early grave.²

¹"Back to the Hand," December 20, 1930, p. 467.

²December 7, 1930, p. 3.

Charles Wade, radio commentator in Auburn, Alabama, declared on his program of February 8, 1931:

It may be readily seen that the contributors of this symposium are attempting what to many may seem a well-nigh impossible task of trying to rouse public sentiment in the South against the modern doctrine of profit-making, but if we have not lost our true sense of values, we will unhesitatingly join with these courageous men in their fight against those who would gladly see the South exchange her quiet Southern towns for cotton mills and automobile factories, and her individual farms for land-holding corporations. The writers of this book endeavor to show the Southerner, before it is too late, that the benefits which the industrialists promise to bring to the South are not benefits at all, but rather a form of slavery more intolerable than pre-Civil War slavery was for the Negro.

In the Des Moines, Iowa, Register the prediction was made:

[These writers] are very likely to form a nucleus for hundreds or more writers, who will be encouraged by the call of these men. And among them they will revive an interest in civilized living in the south that, while it may not counteract, will certainly mitigate and ameliorate the growth of industrialism there. The result, it is not too much to believe, will be the saving of the South.¹

Support from distinguished men of letters also was not lacking. John Peale Bishop, Southern poet and essayist, wrote Tate in 1931 of his astonishment and delight at finding himself in almost complete agreement, particularly with the Twelve Southerners' view that there is no economic, no social health where agriculture succumbs to industry.² T. S. Eliot, who had

¹November 19, 1930.

²The symposium was also the genesis for a poem. John Peale Bishop, talking with Malcolm Cowley about the contributors to I'll Take My Stand, wrote as a result of this conversation, the poem "The Truth about the Dew." While he chose images from the South, they were intended to have wider implications, he said. The rabbit, suggested by Rimbaud, is the poet who sees all colors, in contrast to those whose class and economic limitations permit the vision of only one color. This was one of two poems Bishop sent Tate to represent his work in the issue of Poetry [May, 1932] devoted to Southern poets. (Tate was editor.) The poem follows:

briefly noted the symposium's publication in the Criterion and who later commented on the Agrarians' position in an essay¹ for the American Review, wrote Tate shortly after the publication of the symposium that if time was available he would be glad to contribute an article about the book to a Tennessee paper and that he certainly would not write in the spirit of 1860, particularly since he considered the importance of the thesis relevant not only for the South but for all local life in America.

Attacks on the Agrarian position in general and the Twelve Southerners and I'll Take My Stand in particular ranged from the superficial and flippant to the searching and grave.

Maybe she dreamed the colonnade:
But surely, surely she has seen
Magnolias drenched in moonlit shade.
Maria sees the dew as green.

Burdened Calida totes the sun
Bundle-headed to her shock;
Her arms are black in unison,
Her shoulders bare. Here dew is black.

But Abner hoeing hillside corn
Swipes his wet hair to clear his sight.
The sun is hilled. He could have sworn
Dew on the long corn leaves was white.

This morning, however, a small
Lascivious rabbit, looking through
A cobweb, shivered and let fall
Myriads of rainbows from the dew.

¹In the April 1931 Criterion he declared: "But it is a sound and right reaction which impelled Mr. Allen Tate and his eleven Southerners to write their book." (p. 485) His later essay was "Tradition and Orthodoxy," published in March, 1934. Eliot wrote at this time: "I know very well that the aim of the 'neo-agrarians' in the South will be qualified as quixotic, as a hopeless stand for a cause which was lost long before they were born. It will be said that the whole current of economic determinism is against them, and economic determinism is today a god before whom we all fall down and worship with all kinds of music. I believe that these matters may ultimately be determined by what people want; . . . that it does not so much matter at present whether any measures put forward are practical as whether the aim is a good aim, and the alternatives intolerable. (p. 515)

Although there were a few less important bastions attacked, critics leveled their barrages against three walls of the Agrarian fortress which seemed to them most vulnerable: its conservatism, its utopianism, and its paralogism. Most of the reviewers directed their guns against the Agrarians' "conservatism"--(which they identified variously as "too conservative," "reactionary") and against a closely related characteristic, sentimental nostalgia. This aspect of the Agrarians' position was the subject for an editorial in the liberal Macon Telegraph even before I'll Take My Stand was published. Focusing on the joys they pictured in a yeoman farmer's wife, the editorialist hyperbolically declared in "Lee, We Are Here!":

The Neo-Confederates have seen the shadows of the smoke stacks and have become as alarmed as ever did a Kluxer at the sight of a healthy-bodied Negro. Their descriptions of a mill village would rival the late Tom Watson's ideas of the devilish architecture of a convent. . . . Their opinion of mill owners would read like William Jennings Bryan's idea of Charles Darwin.

. . . They desire horses and buggies and music boxes to replace automobiles and radios. They want huge Georgian plantation homes with well filled slave quarters to take the place of suburbs and industrial villages. They want plows and hoes to take the place of looms and cards. Their housewives will wrap cheese cloth around the butter and lower it into the well instead of placing it in automatic refrigerators. . . .

We marvel that there is such a group alive in the South today. We wonder at the spectacle of a group of intelligent people who thus resolutely cling to a past that is so hopelessly outmoded.

Henry Hazlitt, reviewer for the Nation, while recognizing the eloquent and touching quality of the group's pleas, declared that if such fears against progress as those expressed in Ransom's essay had prevailed, "we should still be in the savage state--assuming that we had at least accepted such technological advances as flint and the spearhead." The group's reply that the proposal is to "dig in and stop progressing now," Hazlitt continued, "was precisely the position of the conservatives

¹September 24, 1930, p. 4.

among our paleolithic ancestors. . . . This book," he said, "is, in the main, the rationalization of a nostalgia for ancestral ways rather than a rational approach to real problems."¹ Several months later, after the symposium had been published, columnist Coleman Hill (a pseudonym) was even less kind in the Macon Telegraph; labeling the volume "a high spot in the year's hilarity," "an amusing patter-song," he commented on the title: "I like the present title, I'll Take My Stand. Standing is just what this book does. Its laborious effort to pass a given point shows all the speed and mobility of a Stone Mountain."² Most critics by focusing on this element of the Agrarian position tended to ignore its identification of industrialism with communism, but even when the warning was noticed, as the New York World Telegram reviewer did, he found this concern no reason to consider the group forward-looking. Quite the contrary:

The truth is that these twelve are backward-looking in a sense that they do not intend: they assert that they wish a return to the land and to nature and to the tradition that builds both . . . But this fearful looking back, this ever-recurring but unintentional "treason of the intellectuals" will not produce even a pillar of salt (to "take its stand"). Not even the spectre of communism, which the twelve evoke as logical result of industrial progress, will stay the course of either the evils or benefits of industrialism.³

Their program even evoked criticism from the Chancellor of their own university. Several months before the appearance of the symposium, Chancellor Kirkland's rejection of the Agrarians' brand of conservatism was quoted in the Nashville Tennessean: "You can't get back to the agrarian scheme of things. There are arguments on both sides as to the virtues of each system of living, but it's an entirely academic discussion because the anti-industrial plan is impracticable."⁴

¹"So Did King Canute," Nation, CXXXI (January 14, 1930), 48.

²November 27, 1930, p. 4.

³Oakley Johnson, December 19, 1930.

⁴September 22, 1930.

These brief but representative excerpts, focusing on the charge of conservatism, reveal another charge. The Agrarians, it was even more frequently said, were utopian, by which the critics meant unrealistic, impractical. Further, it was argued, they either ignored the facts of history, were ignorant of them, or misapplied them. As reviewers used "utopian" or various synonyms, they intended to suggest not only the futility of the Agrarian program but also the basis of that impotence: the failure to look at facts. W. B. Hesseltine, professor of history at the University of Chattanooga, found that despite the Twelve Southerners' sound emphasis on "a land of simple people with simple arts and leisurely graces, with pride of family, and a love of kin" (a contrast to the usual caricature of a "land of broad verandas which stunk of lavender and old lace"), they made themselves "a little ridiculous by apotheosizing agrarian culture, and elevating the yeoman farmer to a pedestal"; their vision holding forth the hope that a restoration of an agrarian way of life would enrich a soil to nourish the arts had, he implied, no basis in fact:

At no time in history, from Jamestown to Dayton, has the American south been other than a horrible example of the spiritual failure of agrarianism. Before the Civil War its sturdy yeomanry produced no poets worthy of the name, they created no statues, and they erected no cathedrals. Their philosophers, their scholars, and their thinkers were pitifully few. Although they produced politicians and army officers in abundance, the careers of these, directed as they were into anti-social channels, are not particularly worthy of praise. Since reconstruction, the record, although somewhat better, is still not very conclusive that the south can make a consistent contribution to the art of the world. . . . With few exceptions, its universities are inferior to those of the north, and its school systems are backward and chaotic. The places where these things are not true are those places which have succumbed to the drugging influence of industrialism. . . .

One other mistake which these southerners make is their attitude toward the coming industrialism. . . . Most of them realize that the industrialization of the south is inevitable, and it would be better for them to face that fact, and attempt to make the most of it, rather than to adopt an ostrich trick and stick their heads in the soil.¹

¹"The Young Confederates Take Their Stand," The Chattanooga News, November 15, 1930, p. 22. This review afterwards

More explicit criticism against the Agrarians' conservatism-utopianism was leveled by Mencken, who asserted that such a position could never be seriously maintained by anyone who took account of the facts of economic existence in the South:

It is a sad picture, but I have some doubts that it is as sad as the twelve elegists seem to think, nor do they convince me that a return to an "agrarian, conservative, and anti-industrial" civilization would materially improve it. The South, in point of fact, can no more revive the simple society of the Jefferson era than England can revive that of Queen Anne. The mills and factories are there to stay, and they must be faced. Nothing can be done to help the farmers who still struggle on, beset by worn-out soils, archaic methods and insufficient capital. They are doomed to become proletarians, and the sooner the change is effected the less painful it will be . . . what the South needs is not fashioners of utopias, but leaders who are competent and ready to grapple with things as they are. It will get nowhere by following sufferers from nostalgic vapors. . . .¹

Discussions of the "utopian" character of their platform frequently expressed regret that the Agrarians offered no program by which they expected to restore their agrarian community and which they were defending as the traditional Southern way of life. T. H. Alexander's remarks in his column, "I Reckon So," appearing in the Knoxville Journal, were representative; calling their ideas "a beautiful dream," their subject "academic, pure and simple," he asked: "Why did not these doctrinaires who are so cocksure about their diagnosis, leave us a prescription to cure what ails us?"² And in a long review appearing in the Knoxville News Sentinel R. D. Franklin observed:

appeared as an article, "Look Away, Dixie," The Sewanee Review, XXXIX (January-March, 1931), 97-103. Shortly after the review was published, Ransom wrote Tate in a letter: "Here's Saturday's Chattanooga News. A fine spread. Hesselstine I think does as well as anybody could do to answer an unanswerable position. . . ."

¹"Uprising in the Confederacy," American Mercury, XXII (March, 1931), 380.

²January 10, 1931.

"It just seems to us that they speak too feelingly of times ago to be merely conservatives anxious to prevent any further advancement of industrialism. . . . This book alone . . . will accomplish no actual deterrence of industry's advance, especially since no specific measures are mentioned except Mr. Ransom's hazards. . . ." ¹ The one particular proposal--that the South enter the political arena and perhaps combine with the Western Agrarian party--provoked New York Times reviewer Arthur Krock to observe that this suggestion was perhaps the most insecure of all: "Georgians and Carolinians have been seen actually to shrivel with loathing for the folkways of Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska. . . . Not much tradition to sustain in these arts." ² Virginia Moore, basically sympathetic with the Agrarians, wrote in the New York Herald Tribune Books section:

Their devotion, as type and example of devotion all over the South, is in itself praise, defense and argument. But it is not action. The results of industrialism as it exists in the North and threatens to exist in the South are evil, they say; the results of 300 years of living largely on the land were and are good. As a Southerner (by blood and residence) I could wish at this point that they were clearer and more unified as to their plan of action. ³

Few critics took the position of "R. M." who commented in the Louisville Courier-Journal for January 11, 1931: "The book is meant to define an attitude of which it is the militant expression, not to direct action, and its strength lies in that."

The attack on the Agrarians' position as paralogistic was in some instances superficial in nature, in others radical (i.e., fundamental, going to the root). The very connotations of a word like "agrarian" and the uncompromising condemnation of the "machine" suggest a line of criticism many reviewers found difficult to resist: here were academic agrarians,

¹"Can the South Go Back to an Agrarian Culture?," December 14, 1930.

²"Industrialism and the Agrarian Tradition in the South," New York Times Book Review, January 4, 1931, p. 3.

³"What Is the Southland?," November 30, 1930, Section XI, p. 21.

typewriter farmers, Southern writers who--while extolling the glories of the simple life uncontaminated by industrialism--were enjoying the comforts of mechanization, quite loath to give them up. The label of Agrarianism by which the Twelve chose to represent their position was the subject of an amused, derisive critique in a Nashville Tennessean editorial some months before the symposium was published. "Can the distinguished Donald Davidson, the poet and critic, milk a cow?" the editorialist asked "Can the brilliant John Crowe Ransom plow? Can Allen Tate mend a spring which stubbornly refused to pour water out of the designated place? Ah, friends, I fear these philosophers and poets will need a few of us farmers to set them right on agrarianism."¹ T. H. Alexander of the Nashville Tennessean and the Memphis Commercial-Appeal asked in his column: "Wonder how the Young Confederates who yearn for agrarianism and hate the machine age in the South reconcile the fact that Messrs. Harpers published their book 'I Take My Stand' [sic] on a printing press and it was distributed, thanks to industrialism?"² Columnist Coleman Hill implied that the Agrarians' assumptions were self-contradictory, poor in reasoning, and unsound in their use of the past, views which he illustrated with a syllogism and historical evidence:

Syllogism

Mr. Ransom believes industrialism and its products bad.

Mr. Ransom considers propagandist zeal a result of industrialism.

This book, I'll Take My Stand, is a propagandist effort.

Therefore, Mr. Ransom must think this book bad. . . .

Who am I to dispute him?

Challenge

First Assistant Contributor Donald Davidson announces that industrialism stifles the artist.

How does he know? Through the millennia of recorded history, industrialism has existed fewer than a hundred years. In a search for genius it is not fair to hold up

¹September 7, 1930.

²January 10, 1931.

this little ragged corner of time, compare it to twenty or thirty centuries that preceded it, and cry,

"Your present system must be wrong, for it has given us no Shakespeare, Michelangelo or Beethoven!"

To prove his point, Mr. Davidson must balance the first century of agrarianism.

Awaiting the outcome of such a study, I present Shaw, Proust, Nietzsche, Cézanne, Rodin as artistic products of the industrial age; and wonder how agrarian was the commercial civilization which fostered the masters of the Renaissance.¹

More searching assaults were directed against the assumptions that agrarianism and industrialism were historically and irrevocably in conflict and that industrialism was invariably hostile to and destructive of the arts. The group's first assumption, various critics pointed out, was an oversimplification of history, a failure to take into account the economic realities. W. S. Knickerbocker argued that agrarianism and industrialism could not be separated, that King Cotton was maintained by a healthy industrial system of factories, shops, railways, banks.² Former treasurer and supporter of the Fugitive, Jacques Back was quoted in the Nashville Tennessean before the publication of the symposium: "To have the better things of life, the culture and the civilizing influences, we must have industry in the South as well as in other places. . . . Unless we progress along industrial lines, progress in everything else is halted."³ Mencken maintained that "Industrialism, in itself, is not necessarily degrading. The South itself offers salient proof of that fact, for its most highly industrialized state, North Carolina, is today, in many ways, its most civilized whereas its least industrialized, Mississippi, is its most barbaric."⁴ The Dallas News had raised the same issue a few months

¹"In My Opinion," The Macon Telegraph, November 27, 1930, p. 4.

²"Back to the Hand," p. 468.

³"Vanderbilt Chancellor Hits Agrarians," September 22, 1930.

⁴"Uprising in the Confederacy," p. 380.

before: "How come North Carolina, the most highly industrialized state in the South has its most vital university? And what does least industrialized Mississippi have to say about that?"¹ Henry Hazlitt of the Nation declared that the Agrarians had hopelessly confused the issue when they defined industrialism as the "domination of the economic, political, and social order by the notion that the greater part of a nation's energies should be directed toward an endless process of increasing the production and consumption of goods."² Such a definition, he asserted, fails to recognize that "sheer acquisitiveness can appear as frequently under a dominantly agrarian economy as under a dominantly industrial one."³ To regard Industrialism as antagonistic to Agrarianism is a fallacy; "it should be obvious that they are merely complementary"; for the farmer, to be an efficient agriculturalist, must buy industrial implements: "the irony is that only as agriculture is more 'mechanized' will it be able to hold its own against industry." Hazlitt concluded with a harsh judgment: "In short, the real objection to the ideals of these typewriter agrarians is not that these ideals are quixotic or visionary, but that they are stupid. Our aim must be to humanize industry, not to exterminate it."⁴ The weakness of the logical structure of the Agrarians' defensive-attack, according to Hound and Horn critic, Thomas Mabry, was the result of oversimplification and emotionalism. Although the Agrarians "should be congratulated upon taking any stand at all when stands are so out of fashion," and although their bravery was

¹ December 21, 1930.

² Lyle Lanier, I'll Take My Stand, p. 148.

³ "So Did King Canute," p. 48.

⁴ Ibid., 48-49. Perhaps it was the tone as well as the negative bluntness of the review which led Davidson to refer to Hazlitt's "outburst" as "nearly all falsification and bitter attack." To Tate he wrote, "Now we can know we are right, having got such savage treatment at the hands of the most South-hating of all magazines" (January 14, 1931).

to be admired, Mabry wrote, the Twelve had not validated their position with economics: "The direction of modern economy is not the will of an evil few whose intentions have been to enslave their fellow men, it is a universal phenomenon whose ultimate implications were inevitable by the middle of the eighteenth century." He considered it unreasonable to think that an arbitrary segment of the population can be induced to return to agriculture, "fallacious to think of reviving an historical mode of life which has no spiritual significance for the majority of people, whose social and economic inheritance grows increasingly urban."¹

Many of the above criticisms found visual representation in a cartoon which served as a cover for the Masquerader, a Vanderbilt student publication. Created by Charles O. Bissell,² who adopted the pseudonym Gaston Werm, the cartoon captures an element of the spirit of the Agrarian defense as well as the nature and themes of the attacks. It pictures the Agrarians in valiant battle against all manner of pestilent mechanical creatures which have attacked the tree of civilization, growing on their land. The utopian hope is reflected in Davidson's eyes as "the dawn of a new day." The spirit of sectionalism, described by a New York reviewer as "bitter secessionist's resentment"³ is moderated by Dr. Werm into a statement that Tate "has allowed himself to become slightly choleric over the derisive behavior of an even less tidy assemblage of spare parts"; the sheer joy of living close to the land and of delighting in the simple pleasures of nature is personified in John Crowe Ransom, "bonny and blithe," thrilling "to the feel of the good earth beneath his unshod feet." Slightly derisive in tone, "by the happiest accident, the tree of Civilization

¹"Look Away, Look Away," Hound and Horn, IV (April-June, 1931), 437-438.

²Mr. Bissell is now Art Director of the Nashville Tennessean Magazine.

³The New York Sun, December 6, 1930.



grows in their orchard" and ironically calls attention to "a bush around which other embattled Agrarians are beating."

Critiques and commentaries on the Agrarians and their symposium continued through the 1930's appearing as articles in literary and other types of "little" magazines (two of the most distinctive were Henry Nash Smith's "Dilemma of Agrarianism" in the Southwest Review [1934] and H. L. Mencken's "The South Astir" in the Virginia Quarterly Review [1935]); as a foil for differing points of view represented in a collection of essays (W. T. Couch's Culture in the South [1934]); and in a pamphlet attacking some of the economic assumptions of Agrarianism (R. P. Blackmur's Psyche in the South); as a chapter in a book of personal recollections (Jonathan Daniels' A Southerner Discovers the South). Among these, Smith's and Blackmur's were the most impressive critiques. Both attacked the Agrarian position and program on the basis of contradictions in philosophical assumptions, or conflicts between economic realities and philosophical views.¹ Commentaries did not cease with the advent of World War II. Through the 1940's and 1950's the Agrarian view and the "Agrarian" poets, novelists, and literary critics continued to be noted as worthy or serious thought. To attempt to summarize the arguments, character, or effects of these analyses, however, would lead us from the central consideration and scope of this study. But representative of a perspective reached three decades later is a statement from the special London Times Literary Supplement of September 17, 1954, devoted to American literature:

The writing of the Agrarians was almost entirely retrospective. The past as an ideal (and an idealized) unit of experience both remembered and imagined is one of the major images of modern literature. As . . . an idea made specific by reference to a history, a region, a folk, it remains one of the valuable contributions made by the South to the complex of modern American writing.

¹The character of many of the comments on the Agrarians after the necessity to "review" the symposium had passed was more searching. Where relevant, the analyses will be referred to in Chapter VIII of this study.

Strategies and Propaganda for the
Agrarian Cause, 1930-1939

To call the Agrarians "utopians" and to conclude simply that they were dreamers, theorizers who advanced a design for an ideal life to be realized by some mysterious self-perpetuating infiltration is to overlook an important and distinctive characteristic of their group activity. For these twelve Southerners were not content to sit in static satisfaction and "let nature take her course"; their avowal in the Manifesto that "these principles do not intend to be very specific in proposing any practical measures"¹ was true enough, but their activities from the time the symposium appeared until nearly the end of the decade belie the implications of their statement. In the summer of 1929, when Davidson had written Tate, listing several proposals for consideration he concluded, "In general, to get down to the practical plane--to act as well as speculate and talk. There is no telling what a few determined souls may accomplish."² In addition to their writing by which the cause was to be extolled, the Agrarians mapped out other strategies; they became a corps of generals, appointing themselves to various committees to look into acquiring a county paper as an organ of propaganda for their program; establishing a magazine; or procuring foundation money or support from Southerners of means who would give them a free hand to create a "grass roots" movement by which their hopes for a good life could be realized. And although they recognized that their forte did not reside in political action, they looked for means by which their program might appear in the political arena. Nor did they scorn the public platform, conferences, and conventions of various groups where the Agrarian cause could be presented. In fact, with the variety and number of their activities, in addition to their teaching, it is astounding that they maintained their impressive output of essays and book

¹I'll Take My Stand, p. xix.

²August 20, 1929.

reviews in the 1930's. While not all of the articles, of course, were explicitly devoted to the Agrarian platform, most of them were organically related to their views of man and his society, of art, of the "good life," and the South. The journals most hospitable to their Southern-Agrarian contributions included the American Review which in its five years of existence published over sixty articles or reviews by various members of the group, the Sewanee Review, the Virginia Quarterly Review, and, of course, the Southern Review, which made its first appearance in 1935 under the editorship of Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks (with Charles Pipkin as director).

The high spirits, the great hopes and pleasure they shared in planning their strategy for the war against industrialism are suggested in the tone of their letters and communiques to each other. More than a year before the publication of I'll Take My Stand, they were exchanging ideas on what "practical" measures could be taken to help the South. One of the most frequently mentioned was the plan of purchasing or establishing a Southern magazine and a county weekly by which they could insure themselves of a hearing while they spread their gospel. Davidson wrote Tate early in February, 1929, that he favored a Southern magazine "openly provincial" and associated with this magazine a publishing house and a chain of bookstores to serve as a distributing medium. Admitting that the problem would be the financing of such an enterprise, he added, "I am an impossible visionary, but I should dearly like to get embarked on some grand enterprise that had only a fighting chance of success. . . . If there were a Southern magazine," he maintained, "intelligently conducted and aimed specifically under the doctrine of provincialism, at renewing a certain sort of sectional consciousness and drawing separate groups of Southern thought together, something might be done to save the South from civilization." An issue strong enough to join together those who shared their conception of Southern life had to be found; the immediate answer was the symposium, which they were formulating in earnest through the last months

of 1929 and most of 1930. But the possibility of a source for continued publication was not abandoned. Ransom's enthusiastic "welcome-back" letter to Tate in January of 1930 suggested that after the book, "the next thing is clearly to get us a press and go to hammering." The most practical way, he felt, was to buy a Tennessee county newspaper, to be had by assuming the mortgage. By this means they could be most effective. One of their "recruits" had been delegated to price a paper in Franklin, and Ransom had discussed the matter with others of the group who might be asked to undertake to run it: "I am in earnest about this," he declared. The alternatives for financing such a project were listed: (1) buying on credit; (2) securing the backing of some "local patriots"; (3) getting most of the purchase money out of the proceeds from the symposium. According to Ransom, there were certain values to be derived from such a source for publicizing their mission: ". . . there would be some chance, but not much, to fight for the Cause. The point is that with the press available we could issue tracts and a periodical for Southern and national circulation. I am sure our group would offer not less but more than enough of polemical articles, and that we would command a great hearing, and might even make a commercial success."¹ In another letter written late in January, Ransom declared, "We are going to have a conference right away to get this matter going faster. The book by itself is scarcely worth doing if we don't follow it up, and if, in short, we don't get a press and put it to work."² But despite the determination of Ransom and the support of Owsley and Lytle (he had remarked he would make a down payment on the paper if his crops were good in the fall), a county press, owned and run by the group, did not materialize.³ Other plans which were considered but not

¹January 5, [1930--dated by Tate].

²January 25, 1930.

³Many years later (1957) Ransom commented that in his mind, perhaps more than in the others', a county paper as an organ for opinions was the way they could have had an effect

effected included the securing of funds from a foundation (the Guggenheim was discussed, although Davidson expressed strong doubts about this move, maintaining that they might compromise the integrity of the Cause if they accepted money from such a source); the development of political power by joining the agricultural West, a union which, Lytle said, would present a number of fascinating possibilities; and perhaps even persuading the Democratic party to identify with agrarian interests.

The Debates

Yet an audience of considerable size was reached by other means. Their public debates--five in all--attracted large bodies of listeners and received considerable attention from the press. Recognizing that the enemy forces are "colossal" and that they would have to be fought cleverly--by delivering "terrific blows intelligently, . . . backed by some sound information as well as theory" if the Agrarian program was to be "put over," Davidson proposed several months before the symposium was published that as a group they should arouse Southern newspapers "by a studiously organized system of letters, clip-sheets, etc. (Vide: the established technique of propaganda--fight fire with fire.)"¹ And John Crowe Ransom exclaimed in a letter to Tate: "If only we can follow up that book with a furious stream of publications! The New Confederacy vs. the New Republic!"² Acting upon this determination even before the symposium appeared, Tate, Ransom, and Davidson

on the aesthetic level. Other schemes also were under discussion: to buy a house and to settle on the farm, to go around the countryside with paint, sponsoring contests for improving the appearance of property; it was thought that this might work better than economic planning, but nothing came of it. Allen Tate, in commenting on the county newspaper scheme observed that it was an interesting idea but no one was qualified to do it. "We were too grandiose," he observed. (Conversation with Virginia Rock, April 23, 1957).

¹Letter to Allen Tate, August 20, 1929.

²January 5, [1930].

published a joint letter in the Nashville Tennessean objecting to Stringfellow Barr's position on industrialism in the South. This bit of "propagandizing" resulted in a debate before what was probably the largest audience ever assembled to hear the question "Shall the South Be Industrialized?" As the Richmond Times-Dispatch, sponsor of the debate, described the public reaction: "It was not only encouraging--it was amazing."

The manner in which the debate evolved is not only interesting in itself, but it reveals the nature of the Agrarians as a group. When arguments from Stringfellow Barr's Virginia Quarterly Review article, "Shall Slavery Come to the South?"¹ appeared on the Associated Press wires, Tate, Davidson, and Ransom apparently decided that this was an opportunity to argue their Cause. Barr had attacked the Southern "traditionalists" (whom he described as "historically minded and therefore skeptical of revolution, industrial or otherwise") for creating an imaginary dilemma in regard to industrialism: the choice, he argued, was neither soullessness nor helotry if the South accepted industrialization; rather, the South should seek a method for adapting the older culture to the demands of an industrializing society, for the Southerner will not "reject industrialism in a spirit of Gandhian asceticism." In his analysis, Barr had attacked a fundamental belief of the traditionalists: that industrialism invariably means social irresponsibility. While the tradition of social responsibility has been called agricultural, Barr conceded, this has happened "only because it has proved easier to achieve under the less complex condition of agriculture than in machine production." The traditionalists, he maintained, "know that the mere use of wheelbarrows, hoes, and mattocks does not dictate the social system of those using them." Nor did the South choose agriculture because of a hatred of industrialism in pre-Civil War

¹ This article resulted from the two-page outline Barr had worked out for Tate when he had been asked to consider contributing to the symposium. The October Virginia Quarterly Review, in which "Shall Slavery Come to the South?" came out on September 15; the three Agrarians wrote a reply September 20.

days but because cotton, rice, tobacco and cane offered higher profits on the world market. "The Southern traditionalist will waste his breath by apotheosizing the hoe. The same thing that made the South turn to agriculture before the Civil War," Barr maintained, "is making it turn to industry today: its desire to make a living, and a good one, whether with a hoe or a dynamo." Barr labeled both the traditionalists and the progressive industrialists hopelessly "romantic and therefore unfit to cope with the problem of industrialization." Neither the traditionalists' "charming . . . impotent religion of the past" nor the industrialists' "American Death, which leaves its living corpses unburied sitting in speeding motors, at the knobs of radios, and gaping before movie screens" will furnish the way out. The only hope for the traditionalists who wish to preserve their heritage is to cooperate with industry; for the living part of their heritage is the sense of social responsibility, and if restrictive legislation is not set up, if the traditionalists do not pay their debt of cooperation and counsel, then the South will have only itself to blame for not using available antitoxins to control industrialism, if it is a disease at all. Warning that the present policy of low wages and the attitude of Southern industrialists towards unions will inevitably result in bitterness, social wreckage, and eventual capitulation, Barr maintained that the South could not escape industrialism altogether; the South's answer should be to rule out at the start ". . . the gold-rush psychology of high profits based on cheap and defenseless labor," and to "go slow." "The lachrymose traditionalist, trotting in his squirrel wheel of tribal economics" should no longer resort to an inadequate "Anglo-Saxon individualism" to deal with a complicated industrial system,¹ Barr argued.

The Agrarians' answer was swift. Appearing in the Nashville Tennessean September 22 and picked up by the Associated Press, their letter charged that Barr had "in effect sold

¹Pp. 483ff.

out to industrialism," that he had "abandoned the Southern tradition" whose "virtues were leisure, kindness, and the enjoyment of a simple life . . . virtues which thrive in an agrarian climate but do badly in an industrial." Their conclusion took the form of a question, the tone clearly a challenge to further discussion: "If the trouble with our generation is not industrialism, will you be so good as to explain to us what it is?" On September 27 a letter came from Lambert Davis, managing editor of the Virginia Quarterly Review, asking Davidson if one of the three would be interested in a debate on the subject of Barr's article. George Fort Milton, in an editorial for the Chattanooga News, a few weeks later also proposed a debate. Through the mediation of Lambert Davis, the Richmond Times-Dispatch became the sponsor, and on October 16 a telegram arrived from Allen Cleaton, managing editor, asking if one of the Agrarians would like to discuss "regulated industrialism versus agrarianism." With the offer came the promise to carry on an intensive promotion, to find a prominent man to introduce the speakers, and to invite noted intellectuals and industrialists to be seated on the stage. Davidson accepted enthusiastically on behalf of the group; indicating that Ransom would probably be their speaker and asking for a sharper statement of the issue possibly in the form, Industrialism vs. Agrarianism or Shall the South Go Industrial?, he explained, "We do not of course propose a return to [the] Stone Age but ask a fair field for contrasting arguments." On October 30 Davis informed Davidson that Sherwood Anderson, residing in Marion, Virginia, at the time had been secured to give the introductions. In recommendation Davis wrote:

Anderson has the advantage of being a good person from a publicity point of view and also a man who has first hand experience of industrial and agrarian regimes. Throughout his earlier life he saw industry from the inside, . . . If anything he is a bit biased toward agrarianism. Anderson is very enthusiastic over the idea of the debate.¹

¹ Anderson was aware of the character of I'll Take My Stand by the time of the debate. On November 12 he wrote a friend, Charles Bockler, a New York bank clerk and painter:

Ransom, Tate, and Davidson planned their strategy carefully. Regarding Barr's position as "the mystical one of 'mastering the machine,'" they decided to attack their opponent on his belief in a restricted industrialism by arguing that any form of industrialism would result in socialism or even communism. Describing Barr's idea of transferring the old Southern social responsibility to industry as either muddled or not disinterested, Tate wrote Fletcher: "We had naively supposed that the way of life was the main thing, regardless of whether it rose to power. I'm afraid that Barr has a rather typically modern . . . attitude--he thinks if the South gets rich again, it will be the South still. But the South is not a section of geography, it is an economy setting forth a certain kind of life."¹

The debate, held November 14 at the Civic Auditorium, was an amazing affair. Before an attentive audience estimated at 3200 and 3500, with seventy-five guests of honor seated on the stage,² Ransom and Barr debated and refuted arguments vigorously for two-and-a-half hours. Sherwood Anderson revealed in his preliminary remarks an unmistakable bias for the Agrarian position: he wished, he declared, to be "a worm in the apple of progress"; he deplored the awarding of the Nobel Prize

"There is a book just out by a group of young Southerners. I['11] Take My Stand. Have Mary [Bockler's sister-in-law] see if she can't get it in the library. It is an attempt at least to set up a group feeling against industrialism, Communism, etc., and a return to a kind of modified agrarianism. At least it is an expression of something." (Letters of Sherwood Anderson [Boston, 1953], p. 226).

¹Letter, November 4, 1930.

²Among the guests of honor on the platform were Tate and Davidson, Governor Pollard of Virginia, ex-Governor Westmoreland Davis, President F. W. Boatright of the University of Richmond, Leroy Hodges, managing director of the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, and M. J. Bright, mayor of Richmond. Davidson reported that James Branch Cabell had a front seat in the audience and "listened intently, without blinking an eyelash or changing an expression. . . . I am afraid he looked bored; but I am told that he always looks bored." (Chattanooga News, November 22, 1930, p. 25)

to Sinclair Lewis who "hates the small-town American." Although the Agrarians might have warmly applauded his comment, "I am glad . . . there is a movement of young people in favor of the dignity of life on the farm and in small communities," they must have been disconcerted to hear him anticipate one of Ransom's central arguments--that industrialism and communism are really "brothers."

As a result, Ransom, who spoke first, attempted to condense his carefully prepared, systematic argument, but the presentation of his case nevertheless took fifty minutes; Barr assailed his opponent in a twenty-minute extemporaneous reply. Ransom's manner was simple, persuasive; Barr's was fiery, epigrammatic, a series of flashing, aggressive charges. Ransom, describing himself a complete ruralist, labeled Barr's program as communistic in its results: "The grand finale of regulation [of big business], the millennium itself of regulated industrialism, is Russian communism." Barr countered with the surprising charge that the Agrarians were "materialistic" because they assume (wrongly, he maintained) that "spiritual values grow out of an occupation."

The "Southern tradition," its nature and values, became the focus for several sorties into "enemy" territory. Although both debaters agreed that the tradition included a respect for "establishment" and an affection for Southern soil and institutions, Ransom argued that Barr used tradition "not at all as a prescription to live by, but as a gardenia to stick in his buttonhole when he goes travelling in New York." Barr's position, said Ransom, was ambivalent and ambiguous. Barr answered that although he would agree the South had achieved an admirable culture when agrarianism was its economic foundation, he could not conscientiously advise farmers to go back to the land: "I can see nothing glorious in creating out of the farm a sort of mystic Lost Cause." When Thomas Jefferson invented a new type of plow, he observed, the farmers did not reject it "because God had a special fondness for the old model and resented the innovation."

"Individualism" as a characteristic of the Southern tradition served Ransom as reinforcement for his attack on Barr's proposals to regulate industry. Collective bargaining through trade unions goes against the grain of the Southerner, Ransom argued; state regulation with such measures as workman's compensation for injuries, unemployment insurance, and old age pensions would result in asking the state "to perform many functions that ought to be performed by the individual . . . [it] will become more and more like a humanitarian philanthropist, more and more like a paternal relative, and more and more like a business man." Not only would Mr. Barr's unionism be offensive to selfish employers, but, Ransom suggested, it might also irritate the unselfish, even the employee:

. . . Evidently unionism . . . looks like a breach of the southern tradition. The fact is that the laborers at Gastonia were ex-agrarians, newly converted, and right off the farm. They had hardly dreamed that any sort of economic life in a peaceable country would require them to surrender their individualism and join an army in order to get a decent protection. But when they became industrialists they ceased to be persons, they became units of industrial power . . . they were factors in something called mass production.

Ransom's negative view of industrialism was absolute: "Neither Mr. Barr nor anybody else will ever succeed in regulating into industrialism the dignity of personality, which is gone as soon as the man from the farm goes in the factory door."

"Objection to paternalism," Barr responded, "reminds me of the Englishman who disliked America because of little white lines in traffic areas. He said they interfered with his individualism. So with paternalism. State regulation of industry guards the worker. It doesn't limit the freedom of the worker." Ransom had charged that Barr was interpreting "living" as making money. Barr replied that Ransom was trying to deduce culture from carrots and potatoes. Negativism is no solution to the problems created by industrialism:

I accept the weather and I accept industrialism. Both are inevitable in the world today, and if . . . we are committed to money economy, we had better study industry

and devise methods for its control and not go off in a corner and pout, saying we don't like factories. . . . We must not make industrialism the scapegoat for our own silliness.

Barr's conclusion, described by Davidson as "a last sizzling shot," was greeted by a roar from the audience. "When problems are complex," thundered Barr, "you ought never to cry, 'I'll Take My Stand,' but 'Sit Down and Think.'"¹

The debate became the subject of editorials, news reports, and excited conversations. Although there was no decision, Davidson reported that Barr's "pungent sentences won him . . . perhaps a bit more applause than Mr. Ransom's very solid . . . argument got." A few days after the event, Richmond Times-Dispatch editor, Allen Cleaton wrote a congratulatory letter to Davidson, asserting that he felt the discussion was productive of tangible good and that the Agrarian movement would become one of really profound consequence if the fight continued. In an editorial the group was described as arguing "with force and conviction, that if the South does not want to embrace industrialism, it does not have to." The Nashville group, said the Times-Dispatch, "are not children crying for the moon or sentimentalists weeping for a lost civilization." On November 30 Virginius Dabney reported in the New York Times: "They are still talking here [in Richmond] about the debate on the industrialization of the South." Ten days before the event Tate had written Fletcher: "The first purpose of our symposium has been achieved: to create

¹The account of the debate, except where specifically noted otherwise, was derived from Donald Davidson's "Whither Dixie?--Mr. Barr and Mr. Ransom in the Great Debate at Richmond," The Chattanooga News, November 2, 1930, p. 25; a news story and an editorial in The Richmond Times-Dispatch, November 15, 16, 1930; and recollections by Stringfellow Barr, and John Crowe Ransom, in conversations on September 8, 25, 1957.

Nearly three decades after the debate, Barr still felt that the group had not diagnosed the economic position of the South soundly; they did not make a good analysis of "where we were," and they "didn't seem to recognize that their agrarian economy was made possible by the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain and by New England manufacturing." Ransom said, years after the debate, that Barr had given him a "thorough trouncing."

public discussion of fundamental issues, in a perfectly fearless manner. We haven't had anything like it in years, perhaps since '65."¹ A week after the event Davidson was even more hopeful about the possible results of the "Great Richmond Debate of 1930." Finding it "an exceedingly healthy sign in the South today" because it suggested "infinite possibilities of free and honest public discussion before local audiences," Davidson concluded:

It is immensely more important, in the long run, than all the Dayton trials, Ku Klux processions, and black shirt parades. . . . Its meaning is, I devoutly hope, that the south is about to renew its old and nearly vanished genius for honest and forthright public argument.²

Within the next six months the Agrarians were involved in four more debates. None of them seemed as exciting as the first, although they were all effective propaganda in the Agrarian crusade. Ransom served as spokesman for the group on three occasions, Davidson on one.

Arranged in part by H. C. Nixon, who was teaching at Tulane, Ransom's second public debate, with Sewanee Review editor W. S. Knickerbocker, was held in New Orleans on December 15. Not even the combined appeal implicit in the names of De Bow, Jefferson Davis, Calhoun, and Robert E. Lee was sufficient to convince the majority of the audience to support Knickerbocker's argument that the South should develop a diverse economy based on a regulated order of industry, commerce, and agriculture. Ransom's lament for the plight of farmers who had become little more than robots as mill workers screwing on bolt No. 47 day after day won the audience vote for agrarianism; Ransom, said Knickerbocker, had recognized and drawn on the "immense power of the existing nostalgia in the South for the 'good old days'"; in "his subtle employment of sentiment," the editor observed later, lay "the seductiveness of his appeal."³ To Knickerbocker's assertion that "it is

¹Letter, November 4, 1930.

²"Whither Dixie?--Mr. Barr and Mr. Ransom in the Great Debate at Richmond," p. 25.

³"Mr. Ransom and the Old South," Sewanee Review, XXXIX (April, 1931), 223.

left to us . . . to meet [the] problems [of the new economic order] bravely and to resist vigorously any return to a monistic agrarianism which our predecessors found precarious, inadequate and unsatisfying," Ransom answered: "Life must be an art and not a piece of mechanism."¹

The return debate between Ransom and Barr was also well attended; held at the University of Chattanooga on January 9, it differed from the Richmond engagement primarily in the degree of heat generated by the arguments. Barr, Davidson reported, seemed more conciliatory, less pugnacious. As a result the affair was less exciting.

But this mildness was transformed into a more lively exchange when Ransom debated, at Emory University, industrialist William D. Anderson, president of the Bibb Manufacturing Company of Macon, Georgia. Before an audience of a thousand, Ransom reiterated arguments from earlier debates--the dangers from devotion to money crops, from industrial over-production, from advertising. For a stable prosperity, he maintained, "the state should assist people to go back to the land. . . . Walks, machines, streets, and noise are abstractions. He needs to actually touch stone, earth and wood and to know the infinite variety of nature." Countering with statistics, Anderson pointed out that a lack of industrialism and a devotion to agriculture have been accompanied by smaller salaries for teachers, ministers, and professors; by low farm wages, and by a lower net annual income for cotton states--\$500 as compared to \$635 in the South Atlantic states. "The old civilization developed a fine life for those in the big house. For the others it wasn't so good," the industrialist argued.²

¹"Debate Audience Votes in Favor of Agrarianism," Times-Picayune, December 16, 1930, p. 3.

²Ralph McGill, "Agrarianism vs. Industrialism Question Skillfully Debated by Anderson and Dr. Ransom," Atlanta Constitution, February 12, 1931.

The paternalism of some cotton mill owners was personified by a mid-debate demonstration. Workers, trained in the schools of the mill, entertained with recitations and songs.

Well attended by the Agrarians (Ransom, Tate, and Lanier were on hand to witness the exchange), the last debate was held on May 21 at Columbia, Tennessee. Here Davidson met Knickerbocker and argued the Agrarian position from a philosophical, historical, and political perspective. Presenting a closely reasoned analysis of, and attack on, the implications of regulating industry, Davidson warned that the inevitable result would be destruction of the democratic instinct, state socialism, and preparation for Communism. Those who argue the pro's and con's of legally regulating industry, he observed, are like people who open their house to a dragon and then wildly speculate about whether he should be required to eat in the kitchen or dining room, when the real argument should be how to get the dragon back into his den where he will not devour us. "I want to get the industrial dragon out of the house, where he never belonged," said Davidson. Regulation, he implied, not only is unwieldy, but socialistic in character: the state would have to tell every manufacturer how many machines or articles he could make, while every consumer would be informed about how much he must or must not buy; the employer would be told whom to hire and what to pay, the worker whom he should work for and what he should get--everything would have to be regulated to prevent maladjustment, Davidson pointed out.

In metaphors reminiscent of Jefferson's, Davidson described the Southern problem as the need to discover how to

Sherwood Anderson revealed something of the character and spirit of the event in his Memoirs:

"I made a suggestion to the agrarians. 'Do not go about debating with other professors,' I said. 'Get some big industrialist to take you on.'"

"They did just that. There was a debate held at Atlanta, Georgia; an industrialist . . . one Anderson . . . brought with him a troupe of young girls. . . . He had them well trained. In the midst of the debate they marched in. They stood before the audience.

"'Who do you love?' a leader asked.

"'Anderson!' they shouted.

"'Who is the greatest man in the South?'

"'Anderson! Anderson!'"

(Pp. 458-59)

save country life from "being infected and destroyed by the importation of an industrial system which is quite evidently in a diseased, if not in a putrefying, condition." The South's "leisurely, humane ways of life . . . [which] came from the soil . . . gave us Washington, Jefferson, Lee, and many more whom no factory 'civilization' can reproduce." The choice, he concluded, was between the "broad and easy speedway that leads to destruction; and the narrow road, perhaps unimproved and somewhat winding, that has a house at the end of it, and a good life among the old folks at home."¹

Ransom recalled nearly three decades after the events that the debates were great larks. More than that, they were one of the most effective, direct means the Agrarians had found of reaching people beyond their academic world. Nixon recently observed that although "in the short view, the debates . . . served to confuse the central meaning of our work, . . . [they gave] life [and] life counts [since] in this case it continued a call for clarification."²

Conferences

Agrarian activity in the world of public affairs was not confined to debating. On December 12 Ransom presented the case for Agrarianism to the Round Table Club of New Orleans. In July, 1931, John Gould Fletcher spoke on "Cultural Aspects of Regionalism" at a conference sponsored by the Institute of Public Affairs of the University of Virginia.³ Fletcher's defense of regionalism was closely tied to an attack on

¹Text prepared for the debate. Quoted by permission of the author. Mr. Davidson recalled that he had undoubtedly diverged from the manuscript but that this was the line of argument he used. (Letter to Virginia Rock, February 23, 1960)

²"A Thirty Years' Personal View," Mississippi Quarterly, XIII (Spring, 1960), 78.

³Major addresses at the round table conference were given by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Lewis Mumford, Stuart Chase, Howard W. Odum, and Stringfellow Barr.

industrialism and cosmopolitanism, which he argued, is to produce cities like Chicago and New York lacking the spirit of a true community, recognizable by its "one way of looking at things: a way symbolized by Patrick Geddes in the trilogy of place: work: folk." Consolidation leads to shallowness and a resultant degrading of culture: "tabloids instead of good newspapers, crime club fiction in place of the novels, syndicated bunk in place of philosophy." Regionalism, on the other hand, was the answer to "democracy"--i.e., conformity. To "decentralize, desystematize" ourselves, we must go back to our folklore and folk-art. "And to keep them alive we have to stop the factories from growing." While admitting there was little hope that regionalism would immediately overcome the appeal of industrialism, he concluded that "any task [setting] out to rid the world of the incubus of industrialism is big enough for thousands . . . it is false to suppose that industrialism can solve the problem of either prosperity or life."¹

Fletcher regarded the round-table conference on regionalism a real opportunity to restate his "old thesis against the age of competitive industrialism," which he had learned from Morris and Ruskin when he first went abroad in 1908. "The future of regionalism in America," said Fletcher, "seemed . . . bound up with . . . some unknown and incalculable moral factor of conscious agrarianism. . . ."² "The conference," Fletcher reported, "was a resounding success. . . . I sustained my position of a lone hand battling against the tide of modernity for four days, and managed at least to keep most of my ground and cause one or two to revise their extremely urban-centered views." H. C. Nixon, who had come from New Orleans to attend, was, Fletcher said, his "only steadfast supporter," an Agrarian "with a desire for deeds no less than for phrases."³

¹"Cultural Aspects of Regionalism," "Round Table on Regionalism," University of Virginia Institute of Public Affairs, July 9, 1931, pp. 708-709, 713. (mimeo.)

²Life Is My Song, p. 361.

³Ibid., p. 363.

In an attempt to make their Agrarian philosophy more "practically" effective, several of the group attended conferences of the Southern Policy Committee. The first was held in Atlanta, April 25-28, 1935. Chaired by Nixon, its purpose was "to prepare for intelligent political action," or, as Davidson expressed it, "to influence the tone of the public mind . . . [to be] physicians of the body politic rather than political leaders."¹ Davidson attended as a representative of the Nashville Policy Group, one of many study groups in the South established to discuss economic, political, and social problems. Two objectives were adopted at the Conference: (1) "To extend throughout the South the organization of local Public Policy Committees," the membership of which should include "active politicians and business men whose minds are open to facts and who are aware of their responsibility"; and (2) "to encourage consideration . . . of questions which directly affect the interests of [the] local community; [the] State; the South; and the Nation, in order that the members . . . may serve as centers of political discussion [and] prepare themselves for intelligent political action."² As a basis for a Conference discussion, Davidson presented a report on "Democratic Institutions," while Nixon represented the New Orleans Committee in formulating views on "Use of Farm Land (Agrarian

¹"Where Are the Laymen? A Study in Policy Making," American Review, IX (October, 1957), 467.

²"Foreword," Southern Policy, Report of the Southern Conference in Atlanta, April 25-28, 1935, p. 4.

For a discussion of the Policy Committee movement and an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, see Donald Davidson's "Where Are the Laymen?" pp. 456-481. In this account Davidson points out that Francis Pickens Miller, secretary of the Foreign Policy Association, was the chief organizer of a "People's Lobby"--the Southern Policy Committee and the National Policy Committee. Visiting Southern cities in the fall of 1935, he urged that public information should be spread on national affairs: "We listened to his appeal as he outlined a plan for a new kind of 'program making.' I say we, meaning to indicate a discussion group that had grown up in my own city, as in many other Southern cities, when the dark and clamorous urgencies of the Great Depression forced many persons to gather, for the first time . . ., in order to discuss matters economic and political." (p. 464)

Policy)." Davidson's presentation emphasized the importance of good local government, the need to afford adequate expression for "economic functional interests and general regional interests," and adaptations of the mechanism of government to serve these interests and "to avoid the condition of impotence and irresponsibility which apparently is encouraging the Fascist spirit." A step in the direction of reaffirming this "historic position of the South"--i.e., good local government--would be "a wider distribution of property and income." To implement this distributist program, Davidson's statement suggested that governments at all levels rearrange their tax schedules and that "heavier graduated taxation on income and inheritance and on land owned by absentee landlords should be made effective as soon as possible."¹

H. C. Nixon, supplemented the initial report on "Use of Farm Land," which pointed out the South's serious economic straits in regard to tenancy, low income, and low livestock production, with the suggestion that "farmers of the Southeast must be encouraged, educated and directed toward a greater production of livestock and of non-cotton crops by more intensive methods and by cultivating only suitable and highly productive lands."² The Conference representatives agreed unanimously that "to do away in large part with the devastating tenant system in favor of farm ownership, prompt and favorable action on the Bankhead farm tenant bill should be taken."³

¹"Democratic Institutions," Southern Policy, pp. 7-8.

²"Agrarian Policy," ibid., p. 16. This proposal was discussed more fully and specifically by Nixon in his chapter, "Social Planning and Action," in Forty Acres and Steel Mules (Chapel Hill, 1938), pp. 79-89.

³"Agrarian Policy," ibid., p. 16.

Introduced in the Senate in 1935, the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Bill failed to come to a vote in the lower house in that year because of a legislative jam. Although it was designed to enable tenants, sharecroppers, and farm laborers to become land owners by easing the loan policy, lowering the rates of interest, and providing long terms for payment, the bill apparently received little active support from Southern farmers. Nixon wrote: "The South, with so many farmers to be

But within the general report on "Agrarian Policy" a dissent from the implications of the "agrarian" point of view was recorded. The agrarians of the Policy Committee Conference asserted that "independent farm ownership should be encouraged as a way of life, in contrast to the profit motive of the modern industrial system"; that "technological unemployment in industry is a permanent factor in American life"; that "it is not unreasonable, . . . to expect violent revolution unless disinherited [laborers] can be given economic lodging and security in another system, such as relatively self-sufficient agriculture"; that "to advance the principles of agrarianism, a graduated property tax should be adopted for the purpose of reducing the tax burden on the small farmer and of reducing the market price of large land holdings"; and that "government credit should be extended on liberal terms for the original purchase of the land."¹ While the seven dissenters² did not

touched by the program, was strikingly apathetic, with the exception of a few articulate groups and voices."

That the bill did become law in July, 1937, was the result of the agitation by various groups and individuals and the report of the Farm Tenancy committee, appointed by President Roosevelt. Among those who prepared the report of the Southern situation were W. W. Alexander, a clergyman active on interracial committees, Charles S. Johnson, sociologist of Fiske University, and Lowry Nelson, a rural sociologist. That the Policy Committee was of some influence is suggested by Brooks Hays, then Democratic National Committeeman from Arkansas. In a news letter, dated February 8, 1938, he reported: "There is one problem common to the entire South; namely, adjustment of the agricultural situation--and this is the region's fundamental economic problem. Passage of the Bankhead-Jones Bill, even with its meager appropriation, is one of the most heartening things that has taken place and is important from our standpoint because Policy Committee members have been credited with contributing substantially to its passage. "Occasional News Letter No. 3," National Policy Committee (mimeo.), p. 4. On this issue the Southern Policy Groups had become a lobby, had sent telegrams and letters, and designated members to attend committee hearings (Davidson, "Where Are the Laymen?", p. 473.)

¹ Ibid., p. 18.

² Those who did not accept the implications of the recommendations proposed by the "agrarian" members of the committee, headed by T. J. Cauley, then of the Georgia School of

object to these concrete proposals offered by T. J. Cauley and other "agrarian committee members, they felt "unable to subscribe to the agrarian philosophy in its extreme form as originally projected by the 'Twelve Southerners'" because they considered the conclusions "to be basically unhistoric and emotional." In addition they opposed sectionalism (regionalism) as included in the agrarian program because the South "will continue to suffer from the effort to maintain political and economic distinctness from the rest of the country"; a higher political and economic integration of the South with the nation is needed, they believed. The agrarian emphasis on economic self-sufficiency they regarded as one phase of economic nationalism. Finally, they objected to the agrarian advocacy of "extreme ruralism" because they were convinced that "the great need of the region is to achieve a better-balanced economy, by the encouragement of industry and the professions, with adequate political safeguards"; the agrarian program in its extreme form, they believed, "would prevent the realization of this desirable end."¹ At the conclusion of the Conference Nixon was elected chairman of the Southern Policy Committee for the following year.

By the time of the next meeting, the movement had grown considerably in numbers and vigor. Held from May 8-10 in Chattanooga, the second Southern Policy Conference focused on a broadly defined "Social Security for the South--Urban and Rural." Representatives chose to serve on one of four subcommittees: Social Security and Agriculture, Social Security and Industry, Social Security and the Constitution, and Social Security and Democratic Institutions.

Technology, included B. F. Brown, North Carolina A. and M. College; W. T. Couch, University of North Carolina Press; Virginus Dabney, editor of the Richmond Times-Dispatch; Dale Miller, of The Texas Weekly; S. D. Myres, Jr., Southern Methodist University; T. Charles Poe of the Chattanooga News; and Charles Timm, University of Texas.

¹"The Agrarian View," Southern Policy, p. 19.

One-fourth of the members at the meeting were college professors, Davidson wrote, "mostly, I suspect, of a liberal-to-left wing tendency"; one-fifth were editors and journalists. There were a total of sixty-nine delegates and guests, including seven from government agencies (chiefly Federal), eight from interest groups, three labor leaders as well as several Negroes. The whole cast of the meeting, Davidson felt, was "urban" and "intellectualist."¹ Three of the Agrarians attended--Tate, Warren, and Nixon, who chaired the Conference.

At this meeting, Warren recalled, opinion was divided over whether a statement on the importance and nature of property should be written into the record. An important policy difference developed between the Agrarian group, which now included Herbert Agar who was chairman of the subcommittee on "The Future of Democratic Institutions," and other representatives who felt that the "particularist definition of the economic and social foundations upon which democratic institutions rest [was] not sufficiently embracing."² The original report had held that a vital democracy required a proper economic foundation which meant "ownership of real property" or, for those citizens who cannot be proprietors, a government-guaranteed social security. To have political equality, there must be economic equality, something the founding fathers knew, the report declared. "The American ideal . . . has long been the independent farmer and the small shop-keeper. . . . What was once the presupposition of the democratic process in America must now become its goal."³ After lengthy discussion the subcommittee was instructed to redraft the report and to include, in addition to the small unit, other concepts of the institution of property: specifically, the Conference wished

¹"Where Are the Laymen?," p. 476.

²George Fort Milton, "What are Democratic Institutions?" Appendix IV, Second Southern Policy Conference Report, ed. Francis Pickens Miller (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1936), p. 18.

³"The Future of Democratic Institutions," ibid., pp. 4-5.

to add "ownership of a 'security'" (or "finance capitalism," as the critics labeled it), and such enterprises as the steel industry, "the interconnecting telephone structure," or the railroad systems, where size is essential to efficiency.¹ Although there was "earnest and protracted discussion," the committee was "unable to agree on a statement of the nature of democratic institutions."

A minority report--signed by Herbert Agar, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren, among others, although not dissenting from the specific statements of the majority report--pointed out a fundamental conflict between at least two social philosophies: on the one hand, the view that a "collectivist approach" should be sought for "adequate social and economic solutions, probably through the development of strong and pervasive action by a carefully articulated state"; on the other, that the "chief approach to a functioning democracy must be through private property with its wide diffusion and responsible control." The signers of this report wanted "a sufficient reconciliation to permit a unified statement of a practical working program."²

Other currents contributed to the character of the Conference. In the course of a discussion a clash occurred on the floor between Tate and a Dr. William R. Amberson, professor of medicine, who, said Nixon, was very much a socialist at heart. Distinguishing the Arkansas farm tenant union from Communism, Amberson pointedly reminded Tate that many of the tenants could not tell the difference between a Communist and Allen Tate.³ And Davidson noted that while there was agreement on the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Bill, "other types of approach, for example, distributism and agrarianism . . . [were] met with shocked incomprehension, indifference, sheer

¹Milton, ibid., p. 20.

²"The Future of Democratic Institutions," ibid., pp. 7-8.

³Letter to Virginia Rock, July 26, 1960.

refusal to discuss."¹ "A man could be verbally, if not actually, tarred and feathered for talking about such principles; and nobody would be quicker in applying the tarbrush than some of the upholders of liberalism, tolerance, education, and progress," Davidson observed. At the Chattanooga conference, he maintained, an "attempt was actually made to 'purge' the meeting of the disturbing agrarian element."² The Southern Policy groups, Davidson recently commented, were apparently by then "infiltrated by leftists who tried to get the Agrarians thrown out."³ But Nixon observed recently, that "In the Policy meetings we accepted differences of opinion and sought a constructive concensus, not conformity."⁴

In the spring of 1936 Southern and Eastern Agrarians and Distributists (whose views were represented in the Agar-Tate symposium, Who Owns America?, then in the process of publication) met for a conference. About thirty attended, including Jesuits who shared a faith in values to be experienced through a return to the land. Ransom reported that plans for a fuller and more public conference were discussed, but as a result of unsuccessful attempts to cooperate with other groups, there was no disposition to try another meeting. An invitation, issued early in 1937, to the Agrarians as a group to hold a Conference at Northwestern University was therefore not accepted. However, Ransom, Davidson, and Agar did participate in discussions of "the problems and possibilities of social distributism and an integral life in the modern world,"⁵ the theme of the Conference sponsored by the Department of Contemporary Thought.

¹"Where Are the Laymen?" p. 476.

²"Expedients vs. Principles--Cross Purposes in the South," The Attack on Leviathan, p. 314.

³Letter to Virginia Rock, March 16, 1960.

⁴Ibid., August 20, 1960.

⁵Patrick F. Quinn, "Agrarianism and the Jeffersonian Philosophy," Review of Politics, II (January, 1940), 92fn.

Publications

Yet the Agrarians were primarily men of letters. And their Agrarian crusade was fought even more vigorously in the pages of newspapers, national magazines, and literary journals than on the rostrum. About a year and a half after their debates Davidson wrote Tate a letter re-affirming a conviction they had all shared about the importance of propagandizing for their Cause by the written word

We are, after all, writers before everything else. . . . We ought to write, then, and keep on writing. And we should organize our effort around our writing, as we have done in the past, with the sure conviction that if our ideas are right, we shall in the end reach the people who can do the other needful things.¹

Asserting that they would be foolish to give ground when the times were still malleable and people could be swayed for better or for worse in the next decade, Davidson enjoined:

". . . above all, if we are not to be actual political crusaders and revolutionaries, . . . then we must have a care to the books and articles we write . . . we must keep on and not weary in well-doing, for, as the apostle said, In due time ye shall reap, if ye faint not. It is strange to see how even those who denounce you most fiercely are finally influenced by your ideas. Presently they are speaking your vocabulary and applying your principles, as their own."²

Letters, Articles, and Reviews

Some of the Agrarians collaborated in answering a few of the particularly negative reviews and full-length criticisms, for instance, the Macon Telegraph editorial "Lee, We Are Here!" and the column "In My Opinion," by Colman Hill, appearing in the Macon News, November 30, 1930.³ One of the

¹October 29, 1932.

²Ibid.

³In this column Hill reiterated his earlier charge, saying that the arguments of the Agrarians were "nebulous" and "ill-founded," that the authors had a beautiful theory that wouldn't work. He found in their position a similarity to the Humanists' "insistence on decorum, standards of comparison, peace and the accepted virtues"--an argument which led to his conclusion: "The Nashville outburst is an application of this viewpoint to the economic life of a section." Such a

most thorough defenses to appear in a newspaper, however, came from Andrew Lytle whose response to W. B. Hesseltine's review, "The Young Confederates Take Their Stand," was published in the Chattanooga News, December 6, 1930.¹ Lytle attacked several of the historian's views: his idea of culture, the Agrarian charged, was "the familiar New England preachment that culture is bric-a-brac"; his assertion that agrarian culture of the ante-bellum South produced few poets, thinkers, or philosophers, no statues, no cathedrals--only politicians and army officers whose careers were directed into "anti-social" channels--would indicate, Lytle asserted, that Hesseltine is a "galvanized Yankee"; his willingness to permit industrialism to spread to the South was the path to communism. In answer to Hesseltine's assertion that "Agrarian society has failed even more dismally than [the] industrial to foster the arts, which throughout human history have been the products of the cities," Lytle declared:

. . . we wish to remind him that the word [culture] is derived from the Latin infinitive, "colere," to till the soil.

A people so occupied soon develop from their labors a set of habits and customs, all revolving around the common use of the land. This does not mean that everyone must work the ground. An agrarian culture has a religion and needs a priesthood. It has provincial towns and cities to which its citizens may bring their goods for barter. It has its strong men to protect that state, doctors, lawyers, statesmen, philosophers, poets (Vergil defending the agrarian traditions of Rome), orators, craftsmen, petty traders--indeed, every occupation which is needed for its people to carry on their particular way of life. Every ancient civilization was based on an agrarian economy as were the countries of Europe until they became corrupted with an industrial imperialism.

As for the historian's taunt that the pre-Civil War South had contributed nothing to world culture (a chimerical term, Lytle

criticism suggests a superficial reading or an ignorance of the strong criticism the Agrarians (particularly Tate and Ransom) had been making of Humanism. (See pp. 272-76 above for a discussion of the Agrarians and Humanism.)

¹ See p. 337 f. above for fuller summary of Hesseltine's review.

observed), except for politicians and military men: "Being put on the defensive in 1820," declared Lytle, "the South's talented men were thrown into the two professions which could best defend its agrarianism, politics and the army." His letter concluded with a restatement of the purpose of the symposium: "to warn those who live by an agrarian culture . . . , [to point out that] the wealth of a state is the welfare of its whole body, not the accumulation of moneys in the hands of a few men."¹

But Agrarian propaganda went beyond newspaper columns. A mere listing of periodicals which were hospitable to the group suggests the extensiveness of their activity as writers. Certainly not all of the publications by members of the group were focused on their Agrarian Cause: the twelve continued to write poems, novels, short stories; art, theatre, and literary criticism; and articles and books focusing on issues in history, economics, and psychology--in short, they continued to write chiefly as individuals, although, as Davidson said, "they certainly had the benefit, over a long period, of a kind of friendly communion."² But from 1930 to the end of the decade the number of articles either explicitly devoted to various aspects of the Agrarian program or suffused with basic convictions inherent to Agrarianism was large and their quality impressive.

That the Agrarians consciously intended to advance their cause and to gain converts (or at least rally to their banner men of like spirit) through the pages of various journals is also suggested by comments in their letters. H. C. Nixon reported to Davidson in March, 1931, that a piece he had written on banking for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch had been well received by rural bankers and that he planned to do other articles or a feature story for popular magazines. "On

¹Dr. Hesselstine answered Lytle's letter (dated November 25, 1930) in the same issue of the Chattanooga News.

²"The 'Mystery' of the Agrarians," p. 6.

with the agrarian crusade,"¹ he concluded. The summer before, while preparing his contribution to I'll Take My Stand, Henry Blue Kline in a flurry of enthusiasm wrote Davidson about an "excellent" treatment of the population problem and the Malthusian theory:

I expect to use a great deal of it in a projected series of articles. (The first will be a study on Southern economics--about which I now know almost nothing--; the second, a study of Southern society and social arts; the third some conclusions; the fourth from the thesis that the nation is going to have to adopt a Psychology of Standing Still soon or else commit race suicide. . . .)

[June 16, 1930]

Although there is no record that this particular series of articles materialized, the subjects or views suggested were well represented in scores of articles by several of the other Agrarians, notably Ransom, Tate, Davidson, Owsley, Lytle, Nixon and Young.

The Agrarian theory of economics was thoroughly argued. In the winter of 1931-32, while abroad, Ransom was immersed in working out the concept of self-sufficiency as the soundest economic foundation for the American farmer. To Tate he wrote early in January that within a few weeks he expected to finish a book which he proposed to rechristen "Land!" Hoping for a fall publication, he had sent Tate a portion of the manuscript to be circulated among publishers. Ransom was convinced that a bold agrarian tract was needed; despite the fact that "the unemployment commissions in the German cities . . . try to colonize a certain number of their charitable objects in the countryside about, for raising potatoes, poultry, pigs, etc." and that "Bernard McFadden [sic] . . . in America proposes a little temporary agrarianism for tiding-over purposes," Ransom maintained: "I still don't believe anybody's proposed agrarianism seriously, as a piece of regular economics."² Although the book was not published,³ several of his articles

¹ Letter to Donald Davidson, March 29, 1931.

² Letter to Allen Tate, January 3, 1932.

³ In May Ransom wrote Tate that the book had been turned down and that he had decided not to try to negotiate for its

apparently developed from his thinking about the economic situation: "The State and the Land" in the February 17, 1932, issue of the New Republic; "Land!" in the July Harper's; "Happy Farmers" in the American Review for October, 1933; and "Hearts and Heads," a commentary on Aubrey Starke's biography of Sidney Lanier, also in the American Review, March, 1934. To Tate he had described his article "Land!" as "a pretty strong agrarian pronouncement." This would be an appropriate description of all of his essays on economics, for their theme was the same--an attack on industrial capitalism, a plea for subsistence farming, and a warning against the dangers inherent in farming when it becomes a capitalistic activity through concentration on money crops. Recognizing the miserable conditions under which farmers existed and attributing the beginning of their troubles largely to an exclusive devotion to making money, Ransom suggested "an agrarian agitation, sponsored by people who may speak with authority, and leading to action on the part of people who are already on the land and who may return there." What advantages would accrue from re-establishing "self-sufficiency as the proper economy for the American farm"?

It is tempting to write like a poet, philosopher, or humanist about the aesthetic and spiritual deliverance that will come when the industrial laborers with their specialized and routine jobs and the business men with their offices and abstract preoccupations become translated into people handling the soil with their fingers and coming into direct contact with nature. . . . [But] there is enough merit in an agrarian movement if it will perform the pure economic service of restoring the superfluous men to livelihood.¹

publication from such a distance since the subject matter shifts so rapidly and any utterance on it becomes an anachronism before it can get into print. By October, back in Nashville, he reported that the book was nearly a total loss and that he would either burn it or start over again on a new outline. Although he felt he had learned a lot of economics, he sensed that probably his kind wouldn't do and confessed that he lacked the economist's flair, style, or method. (May 19 and October 25, 1932.)

¹"Land!," Harper's Monthly Magazine, CLXV (July, 1932), 221-2.

While the nature and values of subsistence farming were made quite explicit,¹ the implementation of such a philosophy was left rather vague in these Agrarian pronouncements. In "The State and the Land" Ransom raised the question of whether the state should not help to formulate and finance a general agrarian program in order to aid those who would like to go back to the land but could not afford to. Mere doles, he wrote, were not the answer; as the experience in Denmark attested, the state could assist in the development of real agrarian communities, perhaps by buying land for homesteading and by instruction from its expert economists.² And those farmers who seek true self-sufficiency but are faced with the competition of others primarily interested in financial returns "may need some official protection."³

Later Agrarian publications were more specific on the matter of economics although not in complete accord; in particular, Frank Owsley's "The Pillars of Agrarianism" in the American Review for March, 1935, and H. C. Nixon's pamphlet, "Social Security for the Farmer," published in 1936 and widely distributed as a Southern Policy Association Paper. Nixon's book, Forty Acres and Steel Mules, appearing two years later, devoted considerable space to "a broader program of agricultural reconstruction than I read into the writings which have

¹Ransom's description of what is involved in being a self-sufficient farmer in "Land!" is representative of the Agrarian view: ". . . --if [the farmer] is his own carpenter, painter, roadmaker, forester, meat packer, woodcutter, gardener, landscape gardener, nurseryman, dairyman, poulterer, and handy man--then he has a fair-sized man's job on his hands, which will occupy him sufficiently at all seasons [and thus, Ransom implies, seasonal unemployment prevalent under industry will no longer be a problem]. His hard work will come in spring and summer, but if his work slackens after that, no confirmed lover of nature will begrudge him a little leisure time for hunting, fishing and plain country meditation." (ibid., p. 223.)

²"The State and the Land," New Republic, LXX (February 17, 1932), 9-10.

³"Happy Farmers," American Review, I (October, 1933), 533.

come from most members of [the agrarian] group since 1930."¹ Although individual members of the group may have differed in the 1930's on how to re-establish and spread the small farm as a self-sufficient economic and cultural unit, all would have agreed in principle with John Crowe Ransom:

The destiny of our broad acres is not to be the simple feed-bowl of the Western world, filled and steaming; nor even the simple feed-bowl of the United States, absurdly big for the job, and half-filled. It is to be hoped that its destiny is to support an excellent order of citizens, who will be economic dualists, men of unusual integrity and freedom even while they perform a professional function; farmers with more room, and more heart, than most of the farmers of the world, happy farmers.²

Agrarian economics was central in their thinking--and whether they were writing book reviews, literary criticism, articles on Southern culture, politics, history, social conditions, authors or statesmen, their thesis was frequently predicated on Agrarian precepts--at times quite consciously so, at others only implicitly. The themes which Kline had proposed for a series appeared in articles by other Agrarians; in addition, many of the Agrarians were understandably involved in aesthetics and literary criticism. To summarize at this point the central "group" ideas emerging from their post-symposium publications would prove both tedious and repetitious. It is sufficient to note here that as Southerners and Agrarians they sought opportunities for a defense and justification of the Southern-Agrarian way of life, particularly through the medium of the book review. They were authorities on the history, culture, political leaders, and writers of their region; and from their desks came a high tide of reviews of biographies, historical studies, and commentaries on sociological works. Based on Agrarian assumptions, articles discussing the same figures, themes, or books appeared from the pen of more than one member of the group. Of special

¹Forty Acres and Steel Mules (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1938), p. v.

²"Happy Farmers," p. 531.

interest to the Agrarians, for instance, were Robert E. Lee, Joel Chandler Harris, John C. Calhoun, T. S. Stribling, Thomas Wolfe, Erskine Caldwell, and Sidney Lanier; the concepts of sectionalism and regionalism as they related to various fields --history (particularly in reviews of Frederick Jackson Turner's works), politics, social psychology, aesthetics, education, literature, and the folk arts were central themes; studies of the South were part of their bailiwick: W. T. Couch's Culture of the South (1934), T. J. Cauley's Agrarianism (1935), Howard Odum's Southern Regions of the United States (1936), Benjamin Kendrick and Alexander Arnett's The South Looks at Its Past (1936), Arthur Raper's Preface to Peasantry (1936), John Dollard's Caste and Class in a Southern Town (1937), and Josephus Daniels' A Southerner Discovers the South (1939)¹--all were submitted to a thorough analysis. The titles of several articles and reviews suggest the conscious interest in Agrarianism as a thesis for evaluation, for example, in Davidson's "Agrarianism for Commuters" (a review of Ralph Borsodi's This Ugly Civilization), "The Restoration of the Farmer " (a review of The Mainstay of American Individualism: A Survey of the Farm Question by Cassius M. Clay), and "A Case in Farming" (a review of Evelyn Harris' The Barter Lady: A Woman Farmer Sees It Through). Suffused with Agrarian assumptions as well as Agrarian themes, Andrew Lytle's "John Taylor and the Political Economy of Agriculture" is a series of three articles analyzing the relationship of the farm to political power and extolling the Agrarian virtues as understood by Taylor who "reduces them all to a comprehensive phrase--agriculture is the architect of the complete man."²

The Agrarians' awareness of opportunities to advance the cause by writing reviews is revealed in their

¹ A selected listing of the articles is given in Appendix D along with other relevant Agrarian publications appearing between 1930-1940.

² American Review, III (September, 1934), 446.

correspondence. In a letter to Tate dated February 19, 1933, Davidson asked if he had seen Turner's posthumous book, The Significance of the Sections in United States History; noting that the reviews he had read sustained all his major contentions about the nature and importance of sectionalism he suggested that Tate seek some outlet for a review which would give him "a chance to show how our ideas rest on a foundation which not even the most 'advanced' historians can lightly reject." John Crowe Ransom, in response to a wire from the editor of the American Review, asking for a suggestion of a reviewer for Culture in the South, named Tate and then wrote him: "You will undoubtedly be read by every contributor of the volume,¹ and that's a crowd of important people; add to it the other important Southerners who'll read the book and hear about your remarks, and you get the crowd that'll run the South. Nobody can talk to them as you can. In the main the enemy is coming reluctantly over to our side. I suggest that we be wise, fixed, but not repelling. But you know more about

¹Three of the Agrarians, whose essays focused on topics related to Southern culture rather than on economics, were among the contributors: Davidson appeared with "Trend in Literature," Nixon with "Colleges and Universities," and Wade with "Southern Humor." Culture in the South was, however, more liberal than conservative, and was intended in part as an "answer" to some of the views presented in I'll Take My Stand, judging from the editor's "Preface": "One of the most thoughtful books on the South published in recent years, I'll Take My Stand reveals clearly the fallacy of expecting a better way of life as a result merely of bigger and better business; but it falls into the even more serious error of interpreting southern life in terms of industrialism vs. agrarianism. . . .

"There is undeniably a measure of truth in this mode of interpretation, but in following it the fundamental issues in southern life, which are much the same as elsewhere, are almost entirely overlooked. Certainly in the present posture of affairs it is somewhat rash to assume as these latest 'agrarians' do, that farming in the South is a healthy and attractive occupation, peculiarly devoted to the service of genuinely human purposes, and that industry is necessarily a destroyer of human values. This position is a long step backward from that of the agrarians of the nineties who held, in general, that both industry and agriculture could be and must be organized to serve legitimate human purposes." (p. vii)

that than I do."¹

Tate wrote the review. His article, "A View of the Whole South" appearing in the February, 1934, issue of the American Review set forth good Agrarian doctrine amid understandably partisan comments on essays about classes, industrialization, farming, etc. A comment on Broadus' Mitchell's contribution is representative:

I have tried for years to understand what is wrong with Mr. Mitchell. There being, he says, no Old Southern culture that he "can see," it would be well to get more factories in the South. Industrialism is not only the superior economic structure for society; it is also "determined" economically. It is beautiful to observe the forces of history at the service of Mr. Mitchell's desires; I envy him. . . . Although labour troubles in the South have been grievous, they have not been grievous enough. We must catch up with the world; we must completely industrialize the South so that we shall have a problem that must be solved in socialist terms. There is a moral imperative upon us to do this. This point of view, I gather from certain intimations passim in Mr. Mitchell's essay, is "realistic"; that of the Agrarians, backward-looking and sentimental.²

Because the Agrarians were looking for a publication outlet and because they were unsuccessful in their attempts to find funds for purchasing or establishing their own weekly newspaper or quarterly journal, most of them welcomed Seward Collins' offer to publish articles and reviews presenting their attack on a modern industrial-commercial society from a traditionalist-Agrarian-Southern point of view. In fact, Collins envisioned the Agrarians as one of the four cornerstones for his propagandistic journal planned to counteract the effect of such liberal periodicals as The Nation and The New Republic. His invitation to Davidson on March 8, 1933, to consider his journal as an outlet for Agrarian publications, was received with delight. And Allen Tate was enthusiastic also as a letter to Ellen Glasgow indicated. Writing of Collins' plans for

¹Letter, dated by Tate "Autumn 1934"; however, the year must have been 1933 since the review appeared in February of 1934.

²American Review, II, pp. 419-20.

the American Review Tate represented his conviction about the relation of propaganda to literature: "An artist vindicates his tradition not by arguing for it, but by assuming it, and that assumption permits him to take all the world, even when he sees it in terms of a single country, as his province."¹

This Virginian novelist answered Tate on April 3, 1933:

I hasten to tell you how much I like the name The American Review. This seems to me to strike exactly the right note. Do not--oh, do not let anyone try to start a Southern magazine for Southern readers, or attempt to revive the old Literary Messenger. As far back as I can recall somebody in the South, usually in Virginia, was always trying to do this; but it was a mistake both in policy and in psychology, and could lead nowhere but into the grave.

Now, in another period, your group has an opportunity to create an influence that may give the South a new place in American letters. To do this, it seems to me, you must demand, which means assume, a share in making American standards. . . .

. . . I believe, too, that literature must be free to feed in strange pastures, and must remain alive to the world even when it draws inspiration from dying and death. Your chief advantage, I think, lies in what I may call affirmation, as opposed to negation, of life. At present what other group has an idea that is rooted and living? Only the Communists have a vital faith and that faith appears to lead to standardization of thought.²

That the Agrarians took ample advantage of Collins' offer is readily apparent even from a casual glance at almost any table of contents from April 1933, when the American Review first appeared, through October 1937. Except for Lyle Lanier, Henry Blue Kline, Stark Young, and Herman Clarence Nixon,³ all of

¹As quoted by Ellen Glasgow in a letter to Allen Tate, April 3, 1933, Letters of Ellen Glasgow, ed. by Blair Rouse (New York, 1958), p. 133. Copyrighted by Irita Van Doren and Frank Vigor Morley for the estate of Ellen Glasgow. Used by permission of Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.

²Ibid., pp. 133-34.

³The reasons why these four did not contribute to the American Review undoubtedly differed. Lanier and Young, I infer, were involved in research and writing for which Agrarianism seemed perhaps, less relevant: in 1935, for instance, Lanier published, with others, Sensation--Its Mechanism and Disturbances; regularly Young was on the editorial board of the New Republic and was contributing theater criticism.

the Agrarians contributed, and most of them frequently, to Collins' polemical journal. From April through December, 1933, for instance, Davidson, Wade, Tate, Fletcher, Ransom, Lytle, Warren, and Owsley published 15 articles and book reviews. In all, the Agrarians contributed more than sixty articles in the periodical's four and a half years of existence.¹ One scholar recently suggested reasons why the publication was so clearly favored by the group:

At first the Agrarians were glad of the chance to publish in the American Review. For one thing, Collins paid for articles (though he paid poorly and slowly) and this was important for impecunious professors at Southern universities. Furthermore, the Southern Agrarians needed a national sounding board for their economic and political doctrines: the Southern and Sewanee Reviews were chiefly literary organs and could not reach the audience Collins was in touch with.²

That other journals were also hospitable to contributions from the Agrarians is not surprising in view of the fact that they were seasoned literary critics, recognized poets, and lively historians. From 1931 to 1939 articles and reviews appeared relatively often in the Virginia Quarterly Review, Hound and Horn, the New Republic, The Nation, Poetry, the Saturday Review of Literature; and occasionally in the Yale Review, Harper's Monthly Magazine, Scribner's, Social

Kline, as far as I have been able to determine, was not writing for publication; after a short period in the academic world, he turned to the T.V.A. (See the biographical sketches for more detail, Appendix B.) Nixon was directing his energies into other channels: "I did not get lined up with the American Review movement, partly because by the time it got started I was involved in New Deal activities, lobbying in Washington for farm tenant legislation and serving on the WPA rural section committee in Louisiana, later the Farm Security Administration." (Letter to Virginia Rock, July 26, 1960)

¹For a discussion of the relation of the Agrarians to Collins and his Fascist views, see pp. 401 ff.

²Albert E. Stone, Jr., "Seward Collins and the American Review: Experiment in Pro-Fascism, 1933-1937," American Quarterly, XII (Spring, 1960), 13. Stone also named Lanier and Young on the roster of contributors to the American Review (ibid.), but neither name appears in any table of contents.

Forces, Review of Politics, the Annals of the American Academy of Political Science, the Southwest Review, the New Mexico Quarterly, the American Scholar, Journal of Southern History, and the Sewanee Review.¹ But with the first issue of The Southern Review in the summer of 1935, the Agrarians had a second dependable outlet for reviews and articles, in particular those of a more "literary" nature. This is not to imply that Brooks and Warren's journal devoted to modern letters and criticism (theoretical and applied) is to be construed as a propaganda organ for professional "Southernism" or Agrarianism; rather, members of the Agrarian group could be counted on for intelligent and informed essays and commentaries on a variety of fields and authors, in particular, critical theories, poetry, the relation of art and society, modern novels and novelists (e.g., Thomas Wolfe, Erskine Caldwell, William Faulkner), drama, social psychology, history, and economics. Here Tate's "Mr. Burke [Kenneth] and the Historical Environment"² and his "A Traditionist Looks at Progress"³ appeared;

¹Through the decade of the 1930's surprisingly only three articles by the Agrarians appeared in the pages of Knickerbocker's Sewanee Review, two by Nixon in 1931: "DeBow's Review" and "The Conscious South," and one by Ransom, a proposal to inaugurate what might now be considered a kind of Fulbright program; "Shall We Complete the Trade?" (published in April, 1933) suggested that debtor nations--in particular Great Britain, France, and Italy--settle their obligations to the United States by establishing a fund for higher education, enabling good students and faculty to study abroad for the next fifty years. But no "Agrarian" essays, no other reviews appeared from members of the group, not, I suspect, because they were unwelcome but because they chose not to appear there. However, Knickerbocker, who had debated against both Ransom and Davidson early in 1931, frequently referred to the Agrarians in his column "Asides and Soliloquies" and in 1934 issued an open invitation to the group to write its history or to edit one issue of the Review to be devoted "entirely to the history, definitions, achievements, and directions of the movement." (Sewanee Review, XLII (October-December, 1934), 386.) Such an article was written by Davidson; but it was submitted first to the Virginia Quarterly Review, and was published in the American Review (Summer, 1935). Of his relations with the Agrarians, Knickerbocker wrote in 1937: "Moi, I am anathema to most of the Agrarians." ("Asides and Soliloquies," Sewanee Review, XLV [October-December, 1937], 381.)

²Southern Review, I (Autumn, 1935), 363-72.

³Ibid. (Spring, 1936), 731-44.

here Davidson published "Expedients vs. Principles--Cross-purposes in the South"¹ and "Regionalism as a Social Science"²; here Owsley's "A Key to Southern Liberalism"³ and Lanier's "Mr. Dollard and Scientific Method"⁴ were printed.

An interesting and revealing incident indicating the character of the Agrarian group's relationships was initiated by a discussion of Mencken's article "The South Astir" which appeared in the January, 1935, Virginia Quarterly Review. The consequent controversy, involving first Davidson and the editor, eventually drew in other members of the Agrarian group when Fletcher championed Davidson and demanded that the other Agrarians boycott the Quarterly Review because Davidson's article for the Anniversary number in April had been rejected.

After reading Mencken's article, Davidson wrote editor Lambert Davis that he was disappointed to see such a contribution in the pages of the Virginia Quarterly Review, primarily because it seemed to him nonsense as well as a personal attack⁵ stimulated by an essay of his published a few months

¹Ibid., II (Spring, 1937), 647-69.

²Ibid., III (Autumn, 1937), 209-24.

³Ibid., III (Summer, 1937), 28-38.

⁴Ibid., III (Spring, 1938), 657-72.

⁵Of the Agrarians Mencken had written: "There can be no doubt whatever of their good faith, nor of their possession of a certain kind of intelligence . . . they tackle some of the fundamental southern problems with eager and adventurous minds. . . . But only too often, alas, what they have to offer is only a little less absurd than the old balderdash they seek to supplant." Undoubtedly the Menckenia to which Davidson took exception was the comment: "Mr. Davidson passes as an advanced thinker--and in many particulars his thought is advanced enough, God knows--, but whenever he observes an eye peeping over the Potomac his reaction is precisely that of the Mayor and City Council of Dayton, Tenn. That is to say, he simply throws up his hands and yields to moral indignation. . . . It would be hard to imagine anything more naïve--save it be some of Mr. Davidson's grave retailings of the arcana acquired in Freshman History. He seems to believe in all seriousness that the Bryan obscenity at Dayton was a private matter on which the rest of the country had no right to an opinion." ("The South Astir," pp. 51-2, 55.)

before in the American Review.¹ Noting that the Agrarians were used to being ridiculed and denounced on every hand, Davidson nevertheless expressed a concern that the Quarterly Review, by hospitality to such views, might be returning the discussion of Southern affairs "to the condition of obfuscation . . . which Mr. Mencken inaugurated a good many years ago."² Managing-editor Davis wrote an answer to each of Davidson's objections. To the charge that Mencken's essay was too personal, Davis wrote:

When I first read ["The South Astar"], I felt that it was too specifically an attack on you, and particularly an answer to your strictures on him in the American Review, to be published in the Quarterly. Its proper place was the American Review, except for the fact that the American Review does not operate on the policy of free discussion. On further consideration, I changed my mind. In the first place, the article was not so specific that it is unintelligible without reference to your article in the American Review. In the second place, it represents an intelligible point of view--the metropolitan point of view, which, whatever may be your final judgment on it, has had, and still deserves a hearing. In the third place, if it is somewhat more personal in its attack than the average article in the Quarterly, that is because it is by Mencken, and not because he nurses any particular bitterness toward you. That is to say, Mr. Mencken is a public figure, and no one expects him to be aloof and detached, any more than they would expect Bernard Shaw to be solemn, or Allen Tate to be gentle.³

To Davidson's query about whether the appearance of Mencken's article was not contrary to the policy of the Virginia Quarterly Review and whether the issues were not, as a result, being confused, Davis maintained:

. . . on the contrary, I think [the article] brings them into sharper light--the issues are apparent to anyone who contrasts "I'll Take My Stand" and "Culture in the South" or "Liberalism in the South," or who talks, as I did, to Matthew Josephson three days after he talks to you. And I don't need to add that the Quarterly's policy is always

¹The article was probably Davidson's two-part essay, "Lands That Were Golden," published in October and November, 1934.

²Letter to Lambert Davis, January 9, 1935.

³Letter to Donald Davidson, January 17, 1935.

to give a hearing to all intelligible points of view--communist, catholic, urban, agrarian, and whatnot. . . . I can say with all honesty that in publishing "The South Astir," I was not attempting obfuscation, but trying, by presenting a vivid and slashing attack, to clarify issues.¹

For Mencken's central thesis, Davis wrote, he felt the greatest sympathy; even though Mencken went too far, the publication of his retort that it is a mistake to defend the autochthonous merely because it is authchthonous and to damn the foreign because it is foreign, Davis considered, was necessary in order to arrive at a synthesis at all. He wrote Davidson,

[The Agrarians] have done a great work in clearing away sloppy thinking and in presenting issues that should be presented; and I want to give their point of view a hearing in the Quarterly. But I do think that when the Agrarian point of view is stretched to defend everything Southern, it is on untenable ground. . . . I want to see a South conscious of its tradition--because it is a worthwhile tradition, and not simply because it is its tradition--but eager for whatever foreign importations it can use, and willing to listen to outside criticism.²

In making plans for the tenth Anniversary issue of the Virginia Quarterly Review, Davis had invited several of the Agrarians, including Davidson, to contribute. Davidson accepted and some time during the winter submitted a "doctrinal" article giving a history of I'll Take My Stand and the Agrarian group. It was refused, although other contributions, more literary in nature, were accepted from members of the Agrarian group: essays--Tate's "The Profession of Letters in the South," Young's "Encaustics for Southerners," Ransom's "Modern with the Southern Accent," and Wade's "Old Wine in a New Bottle"; short stories--Lytle's "Mr. McGregor" and Warren's "Her Own People"; poetry--Tate's "To the Romantic Traditionalists." Apparently agreeing at the last minute to contribute, Tate considered problems faced by the Southern writer who has no regional outlet for his work; from Davis it elicited an expression of doubt that "any mechanics of publication in the South could solve any problems at all":

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

A "reading public" is a creation of a bourgeois society, and I can not envisage such a public large enough to support a professional class of writers under any other circumstances than a much more industrialized South. Also, I am not sure that I follow you completely in the quality of independence which you desiderate for the professional writer. It's not so much independence as a spiritual community that is needed. It seems to me that the best literature of western civilization has been produced by people who are very much dependent on their communities: the troubadours, the Renaissance dramatists, etc.

You will, of course, admit this latter point, and urge that this is the nub of the whole agrarian point of view. Where I part company with you is in my inability to believe that you can recreate the necessary spiritual community. . . . I don't believe in the possibility of creating or re-creating, an older zeitgeist by sheer intellectual effort. To be perfectly concrete, I see no possibility of creating a genuine peasantry or free yeomanry in the South. Senator Bankhead's newest proposal, if adopted, will try to attempt this, but I believe that the Southern farmer will regard it simply as another hand-out from Uncle Sam. . . . Having said all this, I can say again that I have the greatest admiration for what you and the agrarians are doing. I think that we must cultivate historicity and the best way we can do it is to examine our past. You and the other agrarians have done a great job in promoting this case, and you deserve much credit for it.

[March 26, 1935]

But Tate's "The Profession of Letters in the South" became the lead article of the Anniversary issue while Davidson's contribution was rejected; it thus became the focal point for an exchange of heated letters involving Fletcher, Davidson, Ransom, Warren, Owsley and Tate. The discussion erupted early in March. To Davidson Fletcher wrote on March 5 reporting his and Owsley's reaction of anger¹ at the Mencken essay and expressing the hope that none of the Agrarians would contribute to the Anniversary number of the Virginia Quarterly Review. In his reply to Fletcher's pronouncement that their first duty was to put out of action the "so-called intellectual

¹ Warren had first called Fletcher's attention to "The South Astir" and had told him, Fletcher wrote, that "Owsley was exceedingly angry, and threatened to reply." Fletcher felt that it would be wisest to ignore Mencken who had done the South enough damage; he was the worst thing that had happened to the South since the carpet-baggers, Fletcher said.

guns" being fired into their ranks from the Virginia Quarterly Review, Davidson wrote an account of the delay on his manuscript and its rejection a month after it had been submitted. In high dudgeon Fletcher sent letters followed by wires to Ransom, Tate, and Warren, demanding that either they withdraw their contributions or he would resign from the Agrarian group. Fletcher's peremptory orders were not kindly received: it was felt that the arrangements for the articles to the Quarterly Review constituted a private matter between the individual and the journal; further, since the accepted articles were not explicitly involved with Agrarianism, to demand group action was irrelevant, one member said. But the most important consideration was not to break up the Agrarian group or personal friendships, and on this issue the Agrarians who were most directly involved were firmly united. Fletcher, it was felt, was temperamentally incapable of belonging to a group because he tended to identify the cause with himself rather than to identify with a cause; furthermore, it was charged by one intimate of the group, he had misjudged the nature of the Agrarians: the men were primarily artists, men of thought rather than of action; they would never seek to be popularizers of a doctrine, and their group movement was to be viewed as a sort of loose confederation rather than a sworn band of brothers; they were individuals who happened to have the same general opinions on certain issues, not a political organization with an enforced party line. Fletcher's demands were not acceded to, and various members of the Agrarian group continued to contribute to the Virginia Quarterly Review¹ through the decade, in particular Nixon, Ransom, Wade, Young,

¹Nixon, Wade, and Owsley contributed "omnibus" reviews (e.g., critical commentaries on several books concerned with similar themes, periods, or individuals). Ransom and Tate published some of their distinguished essays in theoretical and applied criticism: Ransom's "Art and Mr. Santayana," "Criticism, Inc.," later were included in his first volume of criticism, The World's Body; "Narcissus as Narcissus," Tate's noted explication of "Ode to the Confederate Dead," was first

Owsley, and Tate. Nor did the Agrarians disband as a group. They had yet to issue their second symposium.

The Second Symposium: Who Owns America?

Within two years after the appearance of I'll Take My Stand, several Agrarians were discussing the possibility and character of a sequel to their declaration of independence from "finance-capitalism" and industrialism. Late in October, 1932, Davidson suggested to Tate that they should consider another symposium, to be published in 1933 or 1934. Envisioning the collection as being more concrete and illustrative than I'll Take My Stand was, perhaps by the use of definitions and examples, Davidson wrote:

The book should make full use of the present trends toward the farm and small town; of regionalism in art and economics; of what is best in the Humanist and other anti-liberal movements. We should be careful to present ourselves as the advance-guard of the new dispensation, not --as our critics tiresomely say--"reactionaries."

[October 29, 1932]

Lytle, in reply to a letter from Tate which he considered a "fiery declaration of war," reported that he and Lanier had been working on a program for returning five million people to the land. In considering ways of rehabilitating those already there, he agreed with Tate that the answer was not to become involved in the details of a program but to seek, in their next book, practical means of obtaining their objective, perhaps by spreading ideas about the "internal balance of trade" between the agricultural and city-industrial forces. Convinced that the farmer could improve his position since capitalism is dependent upon a stable farming population, Lytle thought of a second symposium organized as the first had been: "This book should deal with the basic matters of

published in the Winter, 1938, issue. Young had again been represented in 1937 with "More Encaustics for Southerners"; and Ransom's "What Does the South Want?"--the essay he chose for Who Owns America?--first appeared in April, 1936.

an agrarian culture, the farms and farmers themselves. Its different phases can be divided up amongst us, and we can write it off in no time."¹ Apparently the discussions continued through the spring, for Ransom wrote Tate in July: "Andy writes with much agrarian fervor. Fletcher talks that way, too, in letters to me lately; and I'm stopping by Santa Fe . . . to talk with him and get the inventory of his ideas for a book. I'm glad there's such a universal resolution on that project. We can easily prepare a fine book for next spring."² By winter the Macmillan Company had been approached and Ransom reported to Tate a favorable letter from the publisher asking to see a table of contents and description. However, after some debate, Macmillan decided not to take the second symposium.

In the mean time, Tate had written Herbert Agar³ about contributing an essay, possibly for the projected second symposium or perhaps for the American Review. Agar's recent The People's Choice (1933), which had won the Pulitzer Prize, had so impressed Tate⁴ that he had written Agar in London. A warm correspondence and friendship developed; Tate and the other Agrarians found in him a fellow spirit; his ideas on property, the relation of the individual to the state, conservatism, industrialism, plutocracy, etc., were compatible with Agrarian

¹February 23, 1933.

²July 24, 1933.

³Herbert Agar was from 1929 to 1934 London correspondent for the Louisville Courier-Journal and Times and served as special assistant to the American ambassador at London from 1930-34. During the period when he was helping to plan and edit Who Owns America? he published Land of the Free (1935) and What Is America? (1936).

⁴Tate reviewed Agar's book; the analysis, "Where Are the People?," focuses on Agrarian themes (although they are not so labeled): "Mr. Agar has no 'solution'; yet he shows clearly that the systematic looting of agriculture by industrial capitalism, the indirect but efficient confiscation of property by money power, the reduction of the American citizen to the status of a wage slave--these abuses cannot continue, and must give way to radical changes that may, for a time, be either better or worse." (American Review, II [December, 1933], 236.)

principles, and his frequent appearance in the pages of the American Review through 1934 and 1935¹ is one source from which a relationship between Agrarianism and distributism developed, a relationship which was to be embodied concretely in Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence. It was this book which took the place of the projected sequel to I'll Take My Stand, and as it evolved it became rather different in character from what the Agrarians had envisioned.

Of the original Agrarians, eight contributed to the second collection: the book was more obviously a miscellany, significantly more varied in points of view, orientations, and philosophical allegiances. The fact that it had two editors--Agar and Tate--symbolizes one of its most striking distinctions from the Agrarians' 1930 protest. Davidson has pointed out:

The emphasis should be on the word edited. Mr. Agar and Mr. Tate planned the book, and what Mr. Agar supposedly wanted to do was to harness distributism and agrarianism in one team. No such group consultation went into it as had gone into "I'll Take My Stand."²

In a recent interview Davidson and Ransom indicated other

¹ Among his contributions were "The Task for Conservatism," a carefully argued defense and analysis of an unpopular political philosophy (April, 1934); reviews of books such as Matthew Josephson's The Robber Barons (May, 1934), John Strachey's The Nature of the Capitalist Crisis (May, 1935), and "Private Property and the Monetary Problem," a discussion of the importance of a wider distribution of land (February, 1935). Agar's review of The Permanent Horizon by Ludwig Lewisohn embodies, for example, some of the views which the Agrarians found congenial: "If Mr. Lewisohn really wants to save the good life of which he writes, really wants to de-industrialize and decentralize our society, really wants to put people on the land . . . , he had better join the distributists and stop trying to win this fight with the help of bourgeois liberals. . . . the bourgeois liberal is a buyer and seller from the heart out. He is always likely to straggle from the battle-field to take an option on a pretty site of land and hold it for a rise." ("Cross Purposes," American Review, IV [November, 1934], 110.) After November, 1935, Agar ceased to contribute to Collins' journal. Early in 1936 he spoke of breaking with Collins because of his fascist views. (See pp. 401 ff. for discussion of the relation of the Agrarians to Collins and the charge of fascism.)

² "The 'Mystery' of the Agrarians," p. 7.

reasons why the collection was different in nature. It was hoped that with more points of view represented and with Agar as one of the editors, a wider sympathetic public might be found and there might be a greater effect on Washington.

The "Introduction" to Who Owns America? points up the diversity of contributors: Protestants, agnostics, Catholics; Southerners, Northerners and Englishmen; men of cities and of the land, representatives of cooperatives and advocates of a Catholic movement to restore rural living.¹ But they also shared a point of view: they were "anti-cosmopolitan, anti-monopolistic; and . . . favored the growing tendency toward regional autonomy."² Whatever alliance was possible among men of such divergent backgrounds and interests would of necessity be loose. But there was a common ground:

. . . a belief that monopoly capitalism is evil and self-destructive, and that it is possible, while preserving private ownership, to build a true democracy in which men would be better off both morally and physically, more likely to attain that inner peace which is the mark of a good life.³

From a reading of the twenty-one essays, particularly apparent in those contributed by the Agrarians, emerge the central oppositions: to monopoly or finance-capitalism on the one hand and communism on the other, and to cosmopolitan life. The eight essays contributed by the Agrarians appear in the first three parts of the four-part book: Lyle Lanier's "Big Business in the Property State," Frank Owsley's "The Foundations of

¹Other contributors included David Cushman Coyle, John C. Rawe, S.J., both of whom appeared in the American Review; George O'Donnell, a critic and poet, and James Waller (described by Ransom as a brilliant young economist), both of whom had attended Vanderbilt; Cleanth Brooks; T. J. Cauley, an agrarian; and from Britain, Douglas Jarrold and Hilaire Belloc whose Servile State (1912) was described by Collins as a central distributist document.

²Davidson, "Regionalism in the Arts," The Attack on Leviathan, p. 95.

³Agar, "Introduction," Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence (Boston, 1936), p. ix.

Democracy" and Allen Tate's "Notes on Liberty and Property" are grouped with four others in Part One which has a political-economic focus; Donald Davidson's "That This Nation May Endure --The Need for Political Regionalism" and John Crowe Ransom's "What Does the South Want?" appear in Part Two and focus on sectionalism, regionalism, nationalism and internationalism; and three of the four essays of Part Three, devoted to an application of some of the concepts of Part Two, were contributed by the Agrarians: Andrew Lytle, "The Small Farm Secures the State"; John Donald Wade, "Of the Mean and Sure Estate,"; and Robert Penn Warren, "Literature as Symptom."¹

¹The four Agrarians who did not appear in the second symposium were Young, Kline, Fletcher, and Nixon. Young, I suspect, was not asked to contribute. Kline had not been writing any essays of the character produced by other Agrarians. Fletcher's reactions in the Virginia Quarterly Review episode led Tate to assume he wanted nothing more to do with the group so no invitation was issued. Nixon had at first been by-passed but later was invited to join the group as a result of Owsley's urging. In November, 1935, Owsley reported to Tate that after a frank conversation with Nixon he was convinced Nixon was still an Agrarian who desired the restoration of small property and government control of natural monopolies, despite his association with their "enemies" and his "socialist leanings." The fact that no essay by Nixon appeared in the second symposium was the result of several factors: Nixon, who was teaching in New Orleans and was not in Nashville for discussions about the book, was busy at the time with farm tenant study and other writing; the topic Owsley had suggested--something like "Agriculture and the Property State," Nixon recalls--would not have enabled him to focus his discussion clearly on his economic views: "I could and would have found time to write on the importance and necessity of farmers' cooperation to gain a square deal in comparison with the big property fellows, the giant corporate interests. But Frank Owsley was more of a lone-wolf individualist than I was, and hence I did not contribute. . . . I moved on with New Deal agrarianism, I was and am a cooperative agrarian." (Letter to Virginia Rock, August 20, 1960)

Owsley himself had been reluctant to contribute and had at first refused because he felt he might weaken his professional reputation by writing in areas about which he had no great knowledge or by seeming too partisan, as some historians had charged he was in his I'll Take My Stand contribution and "Scottsboro: The Third Crusade."

Several others were considered or approached for contributions: William Yandell Elliott of Harvard, a former fugitive; Rupert Vance, sociologist of North Carolina, and Ellen

The thinking of some of the Agrarians, in particular Tate's, had extended to include certain ideas from distributism,¹ which has been described as the English counterpart to Agrarianism.² Through the pages of the American Review, which published a number of articles by or about Belloc and G. K. Chesterton, the distributist concept of property (private property widely distributed and controlled by individuals) was fully argued. Tate's "Notes on Liberty and Property," first published in the American Review for March, 1936, was an historical and analytical definition of "real" property and a plea for its wider distribution through as much decentralization as possible; the older "Agrarianism" emphasizing the moral, aesthetic, and cultural values to be derived from living close to nature had virtually been engulfed by distributist economics:

A farm now is not necessarily property. We want to make it property again. . . . Altogether it does seem to be a modest wish. For it is not only necessary to buy the farm or the factory, it is necessary to keep it. It can be kept if we can restore property rights that unite again ownership and control.

Ownership and control are property. Ownership without control is slavery because control without ownership is tyranny.³

Lanier's essay was also an attack on big business, in particular on monopolies which had been protected by judicial interpretation:

Conceived in that constitutional Garden of Eden whose walls are the Fifth and the Fourteenth Amendments, and nurtured by the friendly decisions of a judiciary saturated with ex-lawyers of corporations, these economic giants have become

Glasgow, who, it was hoped, would write a companion piece to Hilaire Belloc's "The Modern Man," hers to be called "The Modern Woman." Sinclair Lewis and Dorothy Thompson were also mentioned as possible contributors.

¹Other elements of Distributism, some of which Agrarianism had embraced earlier, included a preference for monarchy, tradition, a hierarchical society and church (both Belloc and Chesterton were Catholic), and individual freedom through economic power.

²Bradbury, The Fugitives, p. 98.

³Who Owns America?, pp. 92-3.

the instruments of an economic fascism which threatens the essential democratic institutions of America.¹

Governmental action is necessary: Lanier suggested an amendment to the Constitution to regulate "the vast economic empire" and the constructive use of Congressional taxing power to distribute the wealth of corporations.

Appearing also in Who Owns America?, Owsley's essay is firmly grounded in Constitutional history and represents but a slight variation on the same theme: the relationship of personal freedom to ownership and control of productive property. Again, the fear was expressed that private property was all but destroyed, and with it human rights endangered:

The right to life, the right to liberty, to the pursuit of happiness, the right to govern oneself, the right to own property, all natural rights must give way to the fascist or communist totalitarian State which guarantees security and denies freedom--unless private property is put back into the hands of the disinherited American people.²

The clear notes of Agrarianism emerge but less clangorously: Owsley calls for a new Constitution which will reaffirm Jeffersonian principles and take into consideration "the realities of American life, past and present," one of the greatest being sectionalism or regionalism. The Southern bias is subdued.

What is an underlying assumption in Owsley's analysis appears in Davidson's "That This Nation May Endure--The Need for Political Regionalism" as the central motif and in Wade's, Lytle's, and Ransom's contributions as the panoramic backdrop. Agrarian doctrine of I'll Take My Stand shines forth unclouded: in these essays appear once again a defense of regional individuality, an attack on cosmopolitanism (e.g., the New York variety), an elegiac description of "physical, sensory and spiritual" values from the "livelihood farm," and an attack on Big Business, this time for its economic as well as its human failure.

Davidson's article, which was enthusiastically received by Agar as a superb piece of statesmanship, laid out a plan for

¹Ibid., p. 18.

²"The Foundations of Democracy," ibid., p. 67.

political reorganization by regions; based on Frederick Jackson Turner's analysis, Davidson's presentation explained the origin and nature of "warring [regional] imperialism," evaluated a suggestion by William Yandell Elliott for "a system of regional commonwealths to replace the States as members of the Federal organism,"¹ a reorganization which would result in a dependence on a "strong National Government." Davidson concluded that if a new form of regional imperialism is to be avoided, possibly an "Old Federalism, with very small changes" or perhaps "some modern equivalent of Calhoun's principle of nullification"² would be necessary to maintain a fair balance between agrarianism and industrialism. The ultimate political desideratum is independence, "a sacred word in American history" which means, among other things, said Davidson "that the land and the region belong to the people who dwell there, and that they will be governed only by their own consent."³

The essays by Wade and Lytle include the now familiar combination of an impressionistic generalized deploring of the metropolitan mind incapable of or unwilling to appreciate rural living; and the eulogizing of "healthy country life" which contains the promise of a significant political value:

. . . everybody is not fit to follow the life of the livelihood farm. There will always be men incapable of responsibility and ownership of property, even on so small a scale, just as there will be other men whose wits and wills and imaginations demand larger possessions and the honor of command. Regional, climatic, or cultural differences would forbid that so large a territory as the United States should all be divided into yeoman farms. But if our country might boast even one fourth or one third of the population so situated, rural life and therefore the life of the nation would by present comparison become wonderfully stable.⁴

¹"That This Nation May Endure--The Need for Political Regionalism," ibid., p. 127.

²Ibid., pp. 132-33.

³Ibid., p. 134.

⁴Lytle, "The Small Farm Secures the State," ibid., pp. 249-50.

Also appearing in the Virginia Quarterly Review for April, 1936, John Crowe Ransom's contribution to Who Owns America?, "What Does the South Want?," attempted to come to terms with industrialism as a reality in the South. While no less appalled by Eastern Big Business and its effects, Ransom by 1936 had moved toward a position Barr had taken at the time the first Agrarian symposium was published; so Ransom declared:

Now there is practically nobody, even in the economically backward South, who proposes to destroy corporate business. Least of all, it may be, in the South, which wants to see its industries developed, so that it may be permitted to approach closer to regional autonomy.¹

Since the farmers are a class "whom the nation should delight to honor," they should be accorded "special treatment," Ransom asserted; this, one infers, would involve governmental activity: the provision of good roads, a free domestic market, first-class educational advantages, cheap electricity. And if there is to be industry in the South, the "indignities of modern mechanized labor" must be minimized, Ransom maintained. To a Big Business conservative, Ransom's description of what the "Southern attitude commonly is" might sound like creeping socialism or at least New Deal liberalism:

The tenure of the job should be secure; that is, if the job fails, there should be a fresh source of income, a fund in reserve to fall back upon. In other words, the South is entirely sympathetic with our incipient national and State program in this direction.

The houses and premises, so far as they are provided by the company, and perhaps with the assistance of the State and the community, should be brought up to a standard of decent habitableness. . . . The section should be paved, planted in trees and flowers, provided with playgrounds and parks. . . .

There must be adequate medical and hospital services, and provision for good education.²

In a collection largely political in its orientation, Robert Penn Warren's contribution is striking for its analysis of the motivations and problems of the writer. Faced with the need to express his relation to society, the artist, Warren suggested, may seek the easy solution to his literary problems

¹Ibid., p. 185.

²Ibid., pp. 191-2.

by identifying himself with a movement, but both the regional and the proletarian movement are often escapes into rationalization. Warren's affiliation with Agrarianism did not transmute his literary vision into a myopic endorsement of all forms of regionalism nor into an uncritical condemnation of all writers concerned with issues of social justice. Although both movements have in common a "revolutionary" character--since both are dissatisfied with the writer's present relation to society and would like to see it changed--both have a certain amount of faddishness and entail a danger:

The writer, having made the commitment, the profession of faith, feels himself already 'redeemed' as a writer, and is then content with the easy, obvious, and mechanical solution of the purely literary difficulties that confront him when he sets to work. If he is a proletarian writer he feels that the mere presentation of propaganda, the mere fact of writing with the orthodox attitude about a working man or about a strike, is enough; if he is a regional writer he feels that the mere recording with the proper piety the details of folklore, the details of local color, the details of dialect, the love of the 'soil,' is enough. That is not enough.¹

Both kinds of writers, Warren pointed out, may be propagandists, although the proletarian author is more consciously so than the regional.

But, while both may be tempted to simplify their subjects "for the purpose of illustrating a proposition," there are several important differences in their views; these center on (1) the writer's appropriate relation to a class, (2) the concept of property, and (3) political or organizational affiliation. The role of Warren's essay in a collection intended to show that "monopoly capitalism is evil and self-destructive" becomes clear: to indicate how a sound regionalization offers the solution to the modern author's need for identification. "The proletarian movement is an attempt on the part of the writer to reason himself into an appropriate relation to a class," while the regional movement, with its "implied conception of an organic society. . . , denies the desirability of

¹Ibid., pp. 277-8.

such a program, claiming that the focus of literary inspiration should be the individual, not the class."¹ Although the proletarian writer "regards the concept of property--not necessarily his own personal property--as a millstone about the artistic neck," the regional writer connects the idea of "real property as opposed to abstract property with his idea of the relation of man to place, for ownership gives a man a stake in a place and helps to define his . . . organic relation to society."² "The proletarian writer has a bias toward industrialism . . . [;] the regional writer usually, but not necessarily, has an agrarian bias, and writes, not of the metropolis, but of the hinterland. . . ."³ And while the proletarian (communist) writer produces a "type of politicalized literature, [which] just like organized Nazi or Fascist literature, is usually based on a conception of literature as instrument, [and] attempts to reason the writer into an appropriate relation to politics," the regional writer has no political party, no organization, and "in so far as [he has] acted politically, has acted as [an individual] and [has] proposed no specific connection between a literary and a political program."⁴

Tate's comment to Herbert Agar late in 1933 foreshadowed one of the aims of Who Owns America? "Agrarianism," he said, "is not dead. It is an old instinct waiting for its political philosophy to be restored."⁵ The nature of the political action which it was hoped the second joint effort might inspire is suggested in an article by Ransom, published in May, 1936. In answer to V. F. Calverton's charge that the Agrarians and others who shared their assumptions about the South were "modern Don Quixotes stabbing at steel windmills, hoping to destroy them by a gesture,"⁶ Ransom replied:

¹"Literature as Symptom," p. 272.

²Ibid., p. 273.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 275.

⁵Letter, November 17, 1933.

⁶"The Bankruptcy of Southern Culture," Scribner's Magazine, XCIX (May, 1936), 29.

It is not likely that the small Distributist-Agrarian group will cause a vast reversal in American economic practice. Mr. Calverton informs me that Agrarianism is dead, and I think he would have said the same for Distributism, except for the fact that there is a stubborn petty-bourgeois survival which he notes in the South. . . .

But I must suggest to Mr. Calverton . . . [that] a great spontaneous political movement may form now, . . . which will press for Agrarian and Distributist reforms without using these terms or even knowing them. Recently we have seen the re-alignment of the West and the South, so long separated. . . . The farm populations and the petty bourgeois . . . have a great deal of force . . .; they have ballots. . . .

There is no telling about all this. If I try, I can imagine legislatures and Congresses for years to come whittling away at . . . big business . . .: working some destruction inevitably while they are about it; but trying, however clumsily to secure America again to its former proprietors. That, I feel, will be going Southern and remaining American.¹

The hope of the Agrarians and the Distributists that they would reach a large public and attract attention through a philosophy with a moral basis was not to be realized. Although Who Owns America? received cordial critical notice in general, there was no widespread conversion to its political or economic philosophy. It might be considered the last concerted effort of the Agrarians as a group to spread their gospel.

Free America

Not that the Agrarians as a body, were bereft of publication opportunities. Late in 1936 members were invited by Herbert Agar to contribute regularly to a periodical he was establishing: Free America, a monthly, was to be published in New York under the editorship of Chard Powers Smith and Ralph Borsodi. Appearing first in January, 1937, Free America was an anti-collectivist journal, described by the editors as "serving as spokesman for a group of economists, sociologists, and educators interested in the advancement of decentralization, co-operation, distributism, land conservation, domestic production, and the spread of small property ownership."²

¹"The South Is a Bulwark," ibid., p. 303.

²II (November, 1938), no p. Free America ceased publication in the winter of 1946-47.

Both Tate and Ransom, speaking as Agrarians, declined to associate the group with the publication. Tate wrote Agar that he saw no advantage in their being minority directors and editors: "I cannot see our position as a single contribution to a more inclusive position for as I see it we are the center to which other various movements must be drawn." His chief reason for insisting on his view, said Tate, was "our desire to keep the agrarian position intact for future effectiveness. If the magazine is launched as now planned it will become, in a year or two, an organ of eclectic liberal opinion, and if we are in the organization agrarianism will die a quiet death--along with the other ingredients in the liberal stew."¹ Ransom, too, felt that the distinctiveness of Agrarianism would be lost in the eclecticism proposed by the publication since it was to include "some members of the Co-operative Movement, some Single Taxers, some vaguely 'liberal' churchmen, some ordinary progressives." "It was our sense," he continued, "that we would be losing sight of our principles if we started in on that basis, when we still regarded our principles as sufficient."² Lyle Lanier also had written on the matter: "I'm more interested in attacking the economic fascism we now have than in engaging in a Red-hunt," he wrote Tate. "Furthermore, I believe that as far as big business goes (i.e., to the extent that we must continue to have it) an extension of state socialism is both desirable and necessary. In order to have the restoration of real property we must cripple the power of those agencies which now militate most strongly against the welfare of our 'property state.'"³

By April, 1937, Agar, acting on a suggestion from Ransom, specifically proposed to Tate that the Agrarians contribute half of the editorial content each month and that Tate serve as regional editor. Whatever was sent in from Nashville would

¹Letter, December 9, 1936.

²Letter to Professor Baker Brownell, January 25, 1937.

³Letter, December 8, 1936.

appear as the official voice of the Agrarian group, Agar promised. After continued urging from Agar, Tate joined the board of editors in October, 1939, and in November he became literary editor. He resigned in February, 1940. However, the Agrarians as a body did not become affiliated with Free America, although individuals did contribute: Davidson was the only member of the group who offered feature articles from 1937-1940; Tate, Ransom, and Owsley joined him in contributing book reviews. Appropriate to the character of the journal Davidson's articles tended to be political in focus while they were still sectional in point of view: "An Agrarian Looks at the New Deal" (June, 1938), and "On Being in Hock to the North" (May, 1939). The works reviewed by the Agrarians were varied in subject matter: sociological, political, and literary--American Regionalism by Howard Odum and Harry E. Moore,¹ Pursuit of Happiness by Herbert Agar,² Forces in American Criticism by Bernard Smith,³ and The Social Philosophy of John Taylor of Caroline by E. T. Mudge.⁴ In essence these contributions are still clearly Agrarian but no longer do they seem to be a result of a concerted group effort.

Both Who Owns America? and Free America might have been the realization of the dreams and enthusiastic plans projected by the Agrarians after I'll Take My Stand was published; in fact, they might have been the second Agrarian symposium and the Agrarian journal by which the group had hoped to spread their convictions. But they were not, for neither of them was under the complete control of the Agrarians and, indeed, not all members of the group were apparently so certain by the late 1930's that the hope for the South lay in one direction--backwards. Those who had the power to act in such politically turbulent times tended to focus their attention on the present

¹Reviewed by Davidson, Free America, II (October, 1938), 19-20.

²Reviewed by Tate, ibid., pp. 16-18.

³Reviewed by Ransom, ibid., IV (January, 1940), 19-20.

⁴Reviewed by Owsley, ibid., February, 1940, pp. 18-19.

and future rather than on the past. Ironically, although the Agrarians considered themselves Jeffersonians and sought to "recapture . . . a free commonwealth in the Jeffersonian sense,"¹ they represented "an appeal to tradition against modernity and progress" and thus were "earning an undeserved notoriety as potential fascists." Who Owns America? itself was "branded a fascist tract."²

The Fascism Charge

It was this charge--that the Agrarians were fascists--which most horrified and angered certain members of the group. Based on uncritical assumptions and identification by association, this accusation recurred in various periodicals and literary analyses as late as the 1950's. Critics of liberal or leftist persuasion most frequently cited as "evidence" the facts that the Agrarians had contributed extensively to avowed fascist Seward Collins' "Right-Wing miscellany"--as the American Review has been characterized--and that certain elements of the Agrarian program appeared to bear a resemblance to fascism. To evaluate this charge, however, one must consider more specific information. When Collins first wrote the Agrarians, soliciting contributions, he explicitly declared that "contiguity does not commit one contributor to another's views."³ His plan was to offer an organ for the expression of political, economic, and social convictions which were, he felt, conservative rather than liberal; "traditionalist" rather than progressive.⁴ The Agrarians were one of four groups

¹James Truslow Adams, as quoted by Stringfellow Barr in "American Dreams," Virginia Quarterly Review, XII (July, 1936), 477.

²Ibid.

³Letter to Donald Davidson, March 8, 1933, as quoted by Albert Stone, Jr., p. 4.

⁴For a full account of the Fascist views of Collins and their reflection in the American Review, see Stone, ibid., pp. 3-19. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., also discusses Collins and

contributing regularly to the American Review. That they were charged with fascism when the other three--the Distributists (represented by G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc), the Neo-Scholastics (Christopher Dawson and Father D'Arcy of Oxford), and the Humanists--were not was partially the result of Grace Lumpkin's interview with Seward Collins, published February, 1936, in FIGHT, a communist journal. Miss Lumpkin, a Southern novelist and contributor to the New Masses, asked Collins if he was connected with the group of Southern Agrarians who published the Southern Review (the first issue had appeared in the summer of 1935). Collins, explaining they work together, asserted that while they differed on some things, they have the same economic aims; he and Tate (unlike other Agrarians) had similar religious views: "I am not religious, and I am under the impression that Allen Tate is not, either."¹ To her question, "Are you [a fascist]?" Collins replied, "Yes, I am a fascist. I admire Hitler and Mussolini very much. They have done great things for their countries." To the question, "Do you agree with Hitler's persecution of the Jews?" Collins asserted, "It is not persecution. The Jews make trouble. It is necessary to segregate them." Pushing his position to the extreme, he declared that he wished to go back to medieval times; to distribute the land; to educate only some individuals, not the masses, or minority groups such as Jews or Negroes; to destroy the factories; to establish guilds; and to do away with all conveniences, automobiles, even bathtubs (he could rig up a shower, he said²). In her conclusion Miss Lumpkin casually linked the Agrarians with Collins:

This short interview can give only the superficial aspects of the movement which Mr. Collins and the Southern Agrarians represent. I felt after the interview like a person who watches a magician pulling white rabbits out of a

his "reactionary form of fascism" in The Politics of Upheaval (Boston, 1960), pp. 70-73.

¹Grace Lumpkin, "I Want a King," FIGHT Against War and Fascism, III (February, 1936), 3.

²Ibid., p. 14. Collins said later in a letter to the New Republic that the interviewers were so obviously horrified by his views that he decided to have a little fun.

top hat. One knows the magic is all bluff, but the rabbits are real. . . .

I think it is not necessary to say that I do not believe Fascism is already upon us. I do believe after reading a number of books like "God Without Thunder," "I Take My Stand," [sic] and copies of the Southern Review and The American Review, that in those who write for them (some very sensitive and fine writers) there is the beginning of a group that is preparing the philosophical and moral shirt-front for Fascism with its top hat from which the rabbits come.¹

So irritated were Tate and Agar (who were about to issue Who Owns America?) that they wrote Collins protesting the identification of their views with his and suggesting a lawsuit against "the appropriately named Lumpkin." In a public disclaimer, an open letter to Miss Lumpkin published in the New Republic, Tate categorically denied that the Agrarians or Distributists were fascist or that they wished to restore the Middle Ages or the past in any form. "There is no written authority for it," he asserted. He was amazed, he declared, that Miss Lumpkin

. . . had identified all the views of Mr. Collins with all the views of the distributist-agrarian writers with whom I am associated. . . . I am so deeply opposed to fascism that I should choose communism if it were the alternative to it.²

Her reply in the same issue was equally emphatic; quoting from Tate's essay in I'll Take My Stand, from the Manifesto to which he had subscribed, and from Fletcher's contribution on education, Miss Lumpkin argued, "Certainly I must conclude that people who advocate throwing off industrialism . . . advocate a restoration of the age before industrialism began." Implications of Tate's conclusions were disquieting to her:

Retake Southern traditions by violence? Does Mussolini want more than to recapture Roman slave-owning traditions by violence? Reaction is most radical? Hitler in his fraudulent radicalism calls for a return to the pre-trust era.³

¹Lumpkin, p. 14.

²"Fascism and the Southern Agrarians," New Republic, LXXXVII (May 27, 1936), 75.

³Ibid., p. 76.

Admitting that the statements she had isolated from the symposium did not in themselves make the group fascist, she nevertheless maintained, ". . . they are the theoretical foundation of a reactionary movement." Tate and the other Agrarians, she enjoined, should make "an honest examination of the theoretical basis of fascism" and compare it with their own views. Tate declined the opportunity for a rebuttal.

But the matter did not end there. Perhaps the letters from Tate and Agar had led Collins to exonerate the Southern Agrarians publicly; perhaps he was concerned that he had alienated them to the point that they would no longer contribute to the American Review.¹ At any rate, his letter in the June 19 issue of the New Republic asserted that he had not spoken for Tate or the Southern Agrarians, nor had he called Tate a member of his own group since he belonged to none. But the Gordian knot, which appeared at first to have been cut with his statement, in the end remained nearly as intricate:

As to whether the Southern Agrarians are "fascists," Mr. Tate has abundantly shown that he despises both the word and the thing, and prefers communism. On this he and I stand in sharp disagreement. I believe his opinion rises from a misunderstanding of the nature of fascism, which he identifies with its plutocratic aspect, whereas I see it as essentially and ultimately a "petit bourgeois" movement tending toward an agrarian and distributist society. It is for this reason that I do not mind being called a fascist, but rather enjoy it: though I naturally regret that

¹The Agrarians continued to contribute to the American Review through the fifteen issues remaining after the Collins interview was reported. There was, however, a noticeable decrease in the quantity of articles from the group: Davidson had six (chiefly analyses of books of a political or sociological nature); Ransom apparently did not contribute after his "The Content of the Novel" was published in the Summer, 1936, issue; Tate, whose "What Is a Traditional Society?" was published at the same time, appeared once more with Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren in a symposium on modern poetry; Warren's other essay, "Some Don'ts for Literary Regionalists" came out in December. Although Tate reported in January, 1937, that Collins would be willing, undoubtedly, to give his contributors full immunity from his Fascist views, perhaps even putting the Agrarians in a separate section, only two more articles from the group (Davidson's, in the last two issues) were published. The American Review did not appear after October, 1937.

this should afford occasion for contributors to my magazine being labeled with an abhorrent word. But as I have pointed out to them and as Miss Lumpkin's letter illustrates, there is too much similarity between their avowed ideas and those prevalent in fascist movements to escape being called fascists, were I not alive.¹

This was the basis for Collins' continued identification of the Agrarian program with fascism, the source for his expectation that the United States could "achieve a sound social order," by which he meant "agrarian and distributist," something that will come about "only . . . if the principles of the Southern Agrarians (which are superior to those of any fascist country) can achieve prompt and widespread support." "For that reason," he concluded, "I wish the Southern Agrarians and their allies all success, and will continue to do . . . all I can to forward their work."²

Thus, while Tate had been personally vindicated, the Agrarian program, to some extent, remained suspect. A New Republic editorial comment (probably Malcolm Cowley's) clearly set forth the issue asking Tate to reflect on a point emphasized by both Collins and Miss Lumpkin: "Some theories of the Southern Agrarians are quite close to part of Hitler's and Mussolini's programs--the demagogic part of them naturally."³

The charge of fascism continued to appear in various ugly guises. A few months after the publication of the interview Marxian critic V. F. Calverton declared in an article on the South and its "bankrupt" culture:

Underlying this [new agrarianism] movement, as Mr. Collins pointed out in a debate with me on the issue, is the international fascist appeal to the farmers to fight the industrialists and financiers in an attempt to replace the power of Wall Street by that of Main Street. . . . What the new agrarians aim to do . . . is to return to a form of pre-capitalist economy, . . . which is not only most reprehensively naive and fantastic but most dangerously reactionary.⁴

¹"The Sunny Side of Fascism," New Republic, LXXXVII (June 19, 1936), 131-32.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 132.

⁴"The Bankruptcy of Southern Culture," p. 29.

Peter Carmichael, describing and interpreting the implications of "Agrarianism,"¹ alluded to Frank Owsley's American Review article, "Pillars of Agrarianism" as illustrative of fascistic tendencies. Published in the March, 1935, American Review, Owsley's essay had presented a plan to solve the tenancy problem: all of the land owned by insurance companies and absentee landlords and part of the property of large planters were to be purchased by the federal and state governments; every tenant was to be given eighty acres of land, two mules, two milk cows, and a \$300 advance for a year's living expenses. On the basis of this portion of the essay and Owsley's assertion, "I am suggesting a modified form of feudal tenure," Carmichael observed:

In that Review one will find remarkable proposals, some of which reek fascism and Naziism, a shocking substitute for the pastoral view of life which we would naturally have supposed an authentic agrarian to signify. . . .

[The sentiments] have the air and authority of pronouncements by a political fuehrer or an industrial tycoon. Men who plow and dig and chop, men who are dirt farmers rather than city agrophiles, don't talk that kind of language. Their way of life generates and necessitates a hard independence, the very opposite of this proposed bondage, . . .²

The comparison between Fascism and Agrarianism which Carmichael drew in these remarks was both casual and tenuous; with no other

¹"Jeeter Lester, Agrarian Par Excellence," Sewanee Review, XLVIII (January, 1940), 21-29. Carmichael described three interpretations of "Agrarianism"--"(a) a doctrine of hostility toward the city, holding that it is corrupt and unfit for human habitation; (b) a doctrine that some things about the city, though by no means all, are good, and that the prudent and happy life is one which is divided between city and country; (c) a doctrine that the land, and only the land, is the home of man, and that he should remain on it at all costs." (p. 21) Only the third interpretation, he argued, has any significance as a philosophy. The first kind of Agrarian (whom he called a "Urbophobe") is nothing new; the second (the "Agrurbivagantism" type) is much to be desired but this kind of Agrarianism requires considerable wealth. Hence, the Southern Agrarians must be of the third type but their program and views, argued Carmichael, show them to be "paper," not bona fide Agrarians, not true "dirt agrarians." ". . . theirs are the ideas of irritated city men, evidently composed for the literary market. . . . [their] true and proper name . . . is urban mystagogue." (pp. 26, 27)

²"Jeeter Lester, Agrarian Par Excellence," pp. 22-23.

documentation, it might also be called irresponsible by defenders of the Agrarians.

But curiously yet understandably enough, through the 1940's and 1950's the context in which the Agrarian group was most thoroughly analyzed for incipient fascism was literary, and in particular, literary criticism as represented by the "New Critics" whose views about society, man, religion, the state, and literature, it has been said, parallel the precepts of fascism. The event which re-awakened the charge of Fascism against the Agrarians as a group was the awarding of the Bollingen prize to avowed fascist Ezra Pound in 1949. Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren were among the Library of Congress Fellows when Pound was selected as the first recipient of a national prize honoring both his Pisan Cantos published the year before and his entire body of work. The name-calling and the identification of the Agrarians as anti-democratic, reactionary, authoritarian reappeared with no more convincing evidence or justification than had been offered in the 1930's.¹

It would seem, then, that the label of "fascist" attached to the Agrarians is fallaciously synecdochial on two counts: first, even if critics had convincingly demonstrated that particular members of the group were fascistic in their political views or had shown sympathy with such principles, the opinions of one, two, or three individuals cannot be said to represent a group position; second, when an individual or group is identified as an adherent to a political philosophy, it must be clear that the person or body has endorsed the central tenets of the philosophy. On neither count do the Agrarians qualify as fascist.

It has already been pointed out how various critics have attempted to prove individual members of the group tainted with the odor of fascism. But not even Stark Young's careful

¹A fuller discussion of the persistence of this charge of fascism through the 1940's and 50's, in particular a summary of the charges and countercharges in the Bollingen Prize controversy, appears in Appendix E.

avoidance of anti-Fascist statements in a series of articles on Fascism in Italy written for the New Republic constitutes evidence of fascist sympathies.¹ He openly admires a "country people," the Italian Catholic's "sense of symbol, sense of the fact," his inheritance of a "historical instinct," rather than the pragmatic or philosophical aspects of Fascism. The critics' use of the other alternative as proof ultimately is no more convincing. For even though the record of individual Agrarians may not seem entirely clear of the shadow of doubt, even though some may have expressed a particular belief for which a parallel could be found in Italian or German fascistic dogma or practice, this alone does not constitute evidence of Fascism.

Both in theory and practice fascism, claiming the inequality of men to be immutable and beneficial, is predicated on a return to an authoritarian order based upon subordination of the individual to the state and a maintenance of caste and rank. Hitlerian anti-Semitism has been cited as prima facie evidence of this aspect of fascism. It is true that the views of certain Agrarians (Davidson, Owsley, and Fletcher, for example) were based on the assumption that Negroes were to be considered a race inferior, from which it followed that their education was to be directed toward developing particular technical skills and that as a group they should remain segregated. On this issue the Agrarians were most vulnerable.

But the general acceptance of other central tenets should be apparent if the Agrarians are to be called fascistic.

¹ See Young's "Notes on Fascism in Italy Today," New Republic, LXVII (July 22, 1931), 258-60; (July 29, 1931), 281-83; and (August 5, 1931), 312-14. At the beginning of the series Young asserted he would be neither pro- nor anti-Fascist but would deal with more elusive points based on extended acquaintance with Italy. His is the approach of a man of letters--allusive, anti-abstractionist. He found the censorship in Italy a "difficult Fascist pill to swallow," but pointed out that we cannot say our own country is free of censorship: "It is always better to remember," he observed, that we are not making our decisions in an ideal world, that what is one man's meat is another man's poison, and so grant to another nation the possibility of its own diet." (p. 259)

A fascist state is maintained through a fixed hierarchical power structure, sustained by force. Particular Agrarians (Ransom, Tate, Fletcher, and Young) wrote favorably of an élite and a hierarchical society. However, whatever hierarchy they envisioned was based first on the family; the structure thereafter was ill-defined, generally characterized by a grouping of institutions--in particular the church and a decentralized state. Theirs was a "fluid" élite, composed of two groups--artists and yeoman farmers--accepted simply because they were natural aristocrats in the Jeffersonian sense; their "rule" was described not in political but in cultural, aesthetic, and moral terms. The Agrarians generally did not represent the avenue to becoming a member of the élite as closed. Occasional comments from Agrarians--like Stark Young's¹ in his contribution to I'll Take My Stand--which have been cited as evidence of aristocratic snobbery thus do not, either in themselves or in their implications, warrant the leap to an assertion that here is proof of incipient American fascism.

Agrarians' views of government and the importance of the individual in the state also serve to disqualify them as fascists. Fascism depends upon the absolute power of a leader. The individual citizen has duties; the state has the rights. Herbert Schneider's description of this aspect of fascism serves to point up the sharp difference between Agrarian and fascist principles. Nationalist fascism, this political philosopher observed, believes in "the sovereignty of the people as a collective whole over any individual member or group of members." Particular interests of individual members are subordinated to the state:

¹Young's sense of aristocratic superiority is suggested in such passages as the following from "Not in Memoriam but in Defense": "It is impossible to believe that a Southerner of good class, with a father who was a gentleman of honorable standards, pride, and formal conceptions, could regard many of our present leaders, however heroic they appear in the tabloids and in the unconscious lapses of great editorial writers, with quite the naïveté of some self-made foreman in a shoe factory, of some Bowery child, born out of a magnificent, ancient spiritual tradition, but muddled with the crass American life around him." (p. 358)

Since the state is but the embodiment of the ideal unity of its members, each citizen must be completely at the disposal of the state. Nothing for the individual; everything for Italy. . . . Duty, discipline and sacrifice must bind the citizen to the state. The state, not its individual citizens, must be free.¹

To the Fascists, "the whole of life is properly subject to the domination of the State."² To the Agrarians, by contrast, the rights of the individual were inviolate and were to be maintained against all encroachments, whether from the state, the economy, or the culture. They regarded the individual, not the state or the abstraction called society, as sacrosanct. The introduction to their symposium, representing the conviction of the entire group, states:

There is evidently a kind of thinking that rejoices in setting up a social objective which has no relation to the individual. Men are prepared to sacrifice their private dignity and happiness to an abstract social ideal, and without asking whether the social ideal produces the welfare of any individual man whatsoever. But this is absurd. The responsibility of men is for their own welfare and that of their neighbors; not for the hypothetical welfare of some fabulous creature called society.³

The Agrarian ideal state and citizen were characterized as representing a close communion with nature and nature's God and an observance of the amenities of life--revealed in manners, conversation, an appreciation of art, a practice of religion, and the "right relation of man to man." Such elements are not cited as characteristic of fascism.

Yet another fundamental difference between the assumptions of Agrarianism and those of Fascism exists. The Agrarians had a profound respect for and awareness of history--particularly as it had affected and had been experienced in the South. The meaning of the present was determined by what had happened in the past, a reality implicitly accepted by the Agrarians. But Fascism, according to Karl Mannheim, was basically unhistorical, irrational, activistic. It seized upon

¹Making the Fascist State (New York, 1928), p. 104.

²Herman Finer, Mussolini's Italy (New York, n. d.), p. 184.

³I'll Take My Stand, p. xviii.

certain past events, ideas, or "traditions" that would serve to rationalize or justify a principle or an act but would ignore others. Its philosophy explained the expedient deed:

At the very heart of its theory and its practice lies the apotheosis of direct act, the belief in the decisive deed, and in the significance attributed to the initiative of a leading élite. The essence of politics is to recognize and to grapple with the demands of the hour. Not programmes are important, but unconditional subordination to a leader. History is made neither by the masses, nor by ideas, not by "silently working" forces, but by the élites who from time to time assert themselves. This is a complete irrationalism but characteristically enough not the kind of irrationalism known to the conservatives, . . . not silently working forces, not the mystical belief in the creativeness of long stretches of time, but the irrationalism of the deed which negates even interpretation of history.¹

Thus, Fascism both philosophically and pragmatically "used" history to justify the making of new history. It selected from the past a tradition or event to validate a particular program or an aspect of its philosophy. As one historian put it, before the demise of Fascism, "it . . . weaves a vision of destiny out of the warp of its instincts, and the weft of its experience of the outside world."²

On the basis of Mannheim's description of various views of history, the conservatives along with the liberals and socialists, he said, understood political activity as proceeding in a historical framework; "they all agreed that in our own epoch it becomes necessary to orient oneself to the total situation . . . , if political aims are to be realized." But the fascist idea of history is irrational in its "apotheosis of the deed."³ In this context the Agrarians could hardly be confused

¹Ideology and Utopia, trans. by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York, 1936), pp. 134-35. Mannheim quotes Mussolini's assertion: "We are not hysterical women fearfully awaiting what the future will bring. We are not waiting for the destiny and revelation of history. . . . We do not believe that history repeats itself, that it follows a prescribed route." (Ibid., n. 29, p. 137)

²Mussolini's Italy, p. 196.

³Ideology and Utopia, pp. 136-37.

with fascists. The evidence in I'll Take My Stand and in later writings implicitly and explicitly reveals that if any politically connotative label is to be applied, it is "conservative," not "fascist."

* * *

The Agrarians were an active group in the 1930's--writing, debating, lobbying, publishing. But because their direction was contrary to the inexorable current of the stream which was engulfing America, they failed to realize their most cherished expectations: to weaken the power of finance-capitalism, of a commercializing culture, of an urbanizing existence. Their desire to revitalize moral values through a reinstatement of an agrarian way of life was too visionary, too utopian, too sectional, critics wrote after the appearance of I'll Take My Stand. Such charges led the Agrarians to move from theory to application, to develop a more "practical" program and to deal more explicitly with economic and political issues such as the tenancy problem, land distribution, laissez-faire vs. government regulation of industry, absentee-landlordism, and decentralization of government through regional autonomy. But their efforts to be influential in the world of affairs, although they combined forces with the Distributists in Who Owns America?, were doomed by the very nature of their faith: they were seeking to institute a revolt against the destructive effects of technology, of capitalism, of an unquestioning devotion to Progress--the shibboleths of twentieth-century America, by appealing for individual action. Yet the economy, the government, and the culture of American society were acquiring a collectivist character. The Agrarian dilemma proved insoluble: how to bring about a massive return to the land in a society becoming dependent on technology, how to regain individual liberty which would be insured through economic self-sufficiency made possible by farming when the only practicable means to this end (proposed or supported by some of the Agrarians¹) were governmental planning and control. Literary

¹See Owsley's "Pillars of Agrarianism," Nixon's Forty Acres and Steel Mules.

critic Kenneth Burke described the ambivalent Agrarian political position as "a 'spoiled child' theory of politics, where the papa-government is dismissed by the proud bearers of 'freedom' as intolerable interference until it must be called on for help."¹

As the decade waned into 1940 and the picture of Depression deprivations and sufferings was refocused on the horrors of Hitlerian genocide, labor dislocations and violence in unionization activities, World War II and the necessity to produce more food, new machinery and vast quantities of war material, the possibility of re-establishing the tradition of an agrarian society and halting the spread of industrialism was even more remote. Herbert Agar in 1936 was still hopeful that the "seeds of health and reason,"--agrarian ideals--which the Twelve had found in their society might take root, spread, and grow. These Southerners, he felt, deserve credit for the position they took in a world prepared to treat such a stand as lunacy. By 1940 some of the Agrarians who had moved from their sectional Agrarianism into other areas of activity were recognizing that a way of power had, in fact, won men from a way of life; but none of them ceased to direct their energies toward seeking a solution to the problem that to them underlay all other issues of twentieth-century American society: how enjoyment of life is possible within the framework of a commercial, urban, technological culture.

¹"Property as an Absolute [review of Who Owns America?]," New Republic, LXXXVII (July 1, 1936), 245.

PART III

C R I T I Q U E

CHAPTER VIII

SEQUEL

Epilogue

For some of the Agrarians the warm glow of devotion to their symposium and the cause of Agrarianism was to continue through the decades; for others it faded after they left Vanderbilt and became more involved in their careers. Yet Davidson's prediction in a Christmas letter to Tate a year after I'll Take My Stand was published proved for most of the group to be sound in an analogical if not a literal sense. "I opened our book last night and read many parts again," Davidson reported. "It is a good thing, that book--a strong, sincere, right thing. Whatever may come, that book, those ideas are going to stand, I believe--here in the South at least. I read the book again, and I really got excited. It has helped my Christmas spirit. . . ."¹

None of the group have repudiated the values which they had identified with agrarianism as a way of life, but several have found the economics of agrarianism inadequate, the hope for a laissez-faire political system unrealistic. Like certain critics, some Agrarians came to admit that theory alone would not effect the revolution they desired. Fletcher, in a letter to Lewis Mumford early in 1931, declared that he was glad to have been in the symposium but felt that it lacked constructive proposals to restrain and regulate industrialism; when he wrote his autobiography, published seven years after the symposium, he declared that he still felt their "critique of northern industrial civilization and . . . defense of the culture of

¹December 19, 1931.

the old South was . . . an answer to the prayer . . . that some part of America might in some way be delivered from the incubus of the machine, from a false 'prosperity' emerging through applied science and industrial exploitation, a revolt in favor of a premechanical, preindustrial, handicraft state of proprietorship."¹ Yet, he felt, farmers could not achieve status or dignity through individual action alone, and thus he lent his support to the Tenant Farmers' Union.² H. C. Nixon moved even further from the implicit conservatism of the symposium when he wrote in his Preface to Forty Acres and Steel Mules (1938): "I seek a broader program of agricultural reconstruction than that suggested by other members of the group"; a decade later he made more explicit his critique of the inadequacy of their analysis in 1930:

It did not come to grips with the problems of the South's growing population, which has been pressing hard upon an agricultural economy. It offered no alternative to finance capitalism for the control of inevitable industrial activities, and it steered clear of agricultural planning. It did not plump for democracy with sufficient pointedness to escape criticism.³

He would, however, continue to plead as the Agrarians had in 1930 that "Southern farmers be 'saved from exploitation and serfdom,' that we make industrial processes slaves, not masters, and that the South 'exemplify a cultural emergence from a too acquisitive society.'"⁴

Both Nixon and Owsley may be described as generally supporters of New Deal economic philosophy. Indeed, the most explicit statement of Agrarian economics appearing after the symposium, Owsley's "The Pillars of Agrarianism" advocated government participation and controls for a farming economy beyond those effected by most of the alphabetical programs of

¹ Life Is My Song, pp. 356-57.

² Letter to Davidson, November 5, 1937.

³ Possum Trot, p. 147.

⁴ Ibid.

post-depression days. Submitted to a number of the original symposium contributors, "The Pillars of Agrarianism" attempted to state, said Owsley, "some of the basic principles of agrarianism which we were agreed on," although there were differences of opinion on the degree of decentralization. With himself, Owsley grouped Lanier, Warren, and Kline (and to these Nixon might be added) as thinking in 1935 "more in terms of a balanced economy than did Davidson, Ransom, Tate, Lytle, Fletcher, and Stark Young."¹ That is, more industry might be permitted, he felt, "if the right kind of control can be brought about." But to counterbalance the growing industrialization, he proposed a thoroughgoing government participation in the economic life of the nation; his plan--a tacit admission that a theory of agrarianism alone was insufficient--called for national and state governments to purchase all the land owned by insurance companies and absentee landlords (much of it was being destroyed by erosion) and part of that belonging to large planters; to give every landless tenant eighty acres, provide him with a hewn log house and barn, twenty fenced acres for pasture, two mules and milk cows, and a three hundred dollar advance for a year's living expenses. No such homesteader was to be permitted to sell or mortgage his land. Thus, Owsley maintained, 500,000 persons might be rehabilitated in one year at a cost of 1500 dollars per family. For permanent relief from technological unemployment, Owsley suggested that jobless city people, especially those with farming experience, be brought back to the country; thus there would be "an opportunity to restore the healthy balance of population between city and country, which will aid in the restoration of agrarianism and in the . . . preservation of civilization."²

Essential to their agrarian program, he maintained, was the rehabilitation of the soil--to be effected by "a modified

¹"A Symposium: The Agrarians Today," Shenandoah, III (Summer, 1952), 22.

²"The Pillars of Agrarianism," pp. 537-38.

form of feudal tenure where, in theory, the King or state has a paramount interest in the land."¹ By such means and with a plan to assure local autonomy through regional governments, their ideals could be realized:

Once this foundation is securely built, the agrarian society will grow upon it spontaneously and with no further state intervention beyond that to which an agricultural population is accustomed. The old communities, the old churches, the old songs would arise from their moribund slumber. Art, music, and literature could emerge into the sunlight from the dark cramped holes where industrial insecurity and industrial insensitiveness have often driven them. There would be a sound basis for statesmanship to take the place of demagoguery and corrupt politics. Leisure, good manners, and the good way of life might again be ours.²

The movement and symposium, as Owsley described them a few months before his death, were "a severe indictment against crudeness, the insensitiveness, the materialistic philosophy of Industrial America."³

Andrew Lytle's recent commentary on the group's activities continued to emphasize the importance of their critique of industrialism, although he felt, with others, that the use of "agrarian" was a tactical error.⁴ In his evaluation, he focused on another aspect--the spiritual:

We were better prophets than we knew. . . . we principally felt about the machinery of Industrialism that its chief vice was not labor-saving but labor-evicting, depriving man of the uses of all his functions. I don't think we felt we could do anything but ameliorate the situation, if that. Until the depression made of the book a kind of prophecy,

¹ Ibid., p. 539.

² Ibid., p. 547.

³ Letter to Virginia Rock, May 30, 1956. Earlier Owsley had written that although some of the members of the group had been "brainwashed," the result--he suggested--of a change in environment and in the spirit of the times, others had not reversed their thinking but had gone forward in the direction taken in I'll Take My Stand, even though they might recognize that an Agrarian society, however desirable, "is not feasible in the face of World Communism."--Letter to Virginia Rock, April 23, 1956.

⁴ "A Symposium: The Agrarians Today," p. 31.

I rather felt our backs were to the wall. However, I think I felt, and certainly still do, that if we had enough small and moderate farms and enough small business to balance the great corporate monopolies that, at least this far, we could maintain a true capitalism and a true sense of responsibility towards God and the state since all individuals would be proprietors. . . There was still a sense of communities when we wrote that book. This sense is now pretty much gone, which has changed the meaning of family, and so the state.¹

The Agrarian who appears to have moved farthest from his original position is John Crowe Ransom. In a discussion of two essays dealing with "the unhappy human condition that has risen under the modern economy, and the question of whether religion and art can do anything about it," Ransom boldly and unmistakably described and repudiated what many critics have characterized as the group's utopianism:

Suddenly Mr. Southard [the author of one of the essays] proposes to found an agrarian community within which innocence may be recovered. I can reproach him for his phantasy with the better conscience in as much as I have entertained it too, as one of the Southern agrarians.²

To return men to an agrarian economy would require, in Ransom's opinion, too great a sacrifice: not only would "effective science, invention, and scholarship" be lost, but there would be "nothing to speak of in art, . . . reviews and contributions to Reviews, fine poems and their exegesis." No longer would Ransom condemn applied science by elevating the arts at its expense:

The pure though always divided knowledges, and the physical gadgets and commodities, constitute our science, and are the guilty fruits; but the former are triumphs of muscular intellect, and the latter at best are clean and wholly at our service. The arts are the expiations, but they are beautiful. Together they comprise the details of human history. They seem worth the vile welter through which homeless spirits must wade between times, with sensibilities

¹ Letter to Virginia Rock, September 1, 1956.

² "Art and the Human Economy," Kenyon Review, VII (Autumn, 1945), 683, 686.

subject to ravage as they are. On these terms the generic human economy can operate; and they are the only terms practicable now.¹

By 1945 Ransom termed a return to an agrarian economy "a heavy punishment" which had been passed on the German people by the Potsdam declaration; "once I should have thought there could have been no difficulty in seeing it for what it is meant to be: . . . an inhuman punishment, in the case where the people in the natural course of things have left the garden far behind."

Yet, participation by the Twelve in the "agrarian nostalgia," as Ransom characterized their movement, had certain immeasurable values to them as artists: because it represented a mode of repentance not itself to be repented, "it matured their understanding of the forward-and-backward rhythm of the human economy" so that now "they are defending the freedom of the arts, whose function they understand. Not so much," Ransom concluded, "can be said for some intemperate exponents of the economic 'progress'."² In Ransom's view there will always be agrarians but "as for an agrarian 'society' I suppose we shall not again in this country, North or South, see the idea embodied so solidly as that."³

¹Ibid., p. 686. Ransom's amplification of his coming to terms with modern culture appeared about a decade later at the Fugitives' reunion when he said: "The strings that bound us to Europe are all gone. . . . I must confess that I think it's very healthy that we are starting all over here in this country with a kind of culture which is based on mass consumption. And on the political side, while we have people that oppose the New Deal, I should say that the manufacturers and the bankers in the long run will have to keep the New Deal, that they are fooling with economic dynamite if they propose to cancel it. . . . I think that we can't have any effect on the economy, and that what results is that humanism is a way of life; and the people who practice it might as well call it a metaphysical society or a mode of life; that it's a minority group, and it can even be operated by people who are thoroughly attuned to the new economy, because that's the only thing that saves us."--Fugitives' Reunion, pp. 192-93.

²"Art and the Human Economy," p. 687.

³"A Symposium: The Agrarians Today," p. 14.

Both Lanier and Warren in reflection described the Agrarian movement as a metaphorical protest and disavowed any intention that their stand be taken as a blueprint for a cure of an economic infection. Lanier views the symposium as analogous to a myth:

I still subscribe to something of the "spirit" of this statement [the Credo], but certainly not to any literal interpretation of it as a program of social action. My attitude is, and perhaps for the most part always was, somewhat like that of most of my religious friends toward the Bible. Read "poetically" it has meaning as an expression of values that seemed pretty much lost in this country at the height of the Coolidge-Hoover "prosperity." To take the volume literally, to me at any rate and at this time, is like turning to Genesis for scientific cosmology.¹

Warren, while noting the "now apparent very great divergencies among the group, ideologically speaking," observed that "it would be very easy to underestimate the non-ideological unity--the unity of a common background which can give some coherence even to disagreement. . . . I don't think," he added, "I ever believed in a golden age, but I do believe that part of the study of the past should be directed--and is naturally directed--toward the rebuke of the present."² For the period of a decade, Warren confessed, he had shut his mind on what Agrarianism signified for him, convinced it was irrelevant except in a sentimental way. But then, he said, he came to realize that it raised fundamental questions which he was in the process of exploring as a poet and writer of fiction: the "protest . . . against a kind of de-humanizing and disintegrative effect on . . . what an individual person could be" and "the relation of that to democracy." Thus, for Warren, "your simpler world is something I think is always necessary[,] . . . the past imaginatively . . . and historically conceived . . . a better rebuke than any dream of the future . . . because you can see what some of the costs were, . . . because historians will correct,

¹Letter to Virginia Rock, July 18, 1956.

²Letter to Virginia Rock, April 23, 1956.

and imagination will correct, any simplistic and childish notion of a golden age."¹ Aesthetic and political concerns in his view were inextricably interlinked: "We were trying to find a notion of democracy which would make it possible for people to be people and not to be bosses or exploiters, or anything else of other people, but to have a community of people, rather than a community of something else."²

Tate's label for the meaning of the Agrarian philosophy was "religious humanism" or a "reaffirmation of . . . 'aristocratic Aristotelianism'"³--not a political program but a concept implying that only a limited number of people realized the values it upheld. For Tate, too, the significance of their efforts was spiritual:

What I had in mind twenty years ago, not too distinctly, I think I see more clearly now; that is, the possibility of the humane life presupposes, with us, a prior order, the order of a unified Christendom. The Old South perpetuated many of the virtues of such an order; but to try to "revive" the Old South, and to build a wall around it, would be a kind of idolatry; it would prefer the accident to the substance.⁴

Hence, Tate denied that Agrarianism was intended to be a restoration of anything in the Old South: "I saw it as something to be created . . . as a result of a profound change, not only in the South, but elsewhere, in the moral and religious outlook of western man."⁵

With Tate and Lytle, others gave a religious reading to the Agrarian movement. "The Agrarians condemned the pragmatic approach as one of the most vicious of modern errors," Davidson declared. "We are subject to God's will alone; we are not subject to any theory of mechanical determinism originating in the 'social forces'."⁶ Religion--or at least an awareness of and

¹Fugitives' Reunion, pp. 209-10.

²Ibid., p. 214.

³Ibid., pp. 183, 212.

⁴"A Symposium: The Agrarians Today," p. 29.

⁵Ibid., pp. 28-29.

⁶Ibid., p. 17.

respect for the power and mystery of the supernatural--was fundamental in Agrarianism. Frank Owsley, when asked what religious meaning was implied in the symposium, declared: "Without being fundamentalist in the literal interpretation of the Holy Writ, the contributors to I'll Take My Stand, with a few exceptions, felt that no society could long endure that eliminated God from its life and habits. Those who felt thus were likewise supporters of the Christian version of man's relation to man and to God."¹ To the Agrarians economic problems fundamentally were ethical, and ethical beliefs were inseparable from religion. Tate once observed that "belief is not our way of thinking about what we do, for that is rationalization; it is what we do that defines what we 'really' believe."² The Agrarians in 1930 and through much of the decade had hoped that the character of what man really believed might be so modified--if not radically changed--that he would act and live differently; that the aesthetic attitude might be re-introduced into an everyday world; and that although a group might have had "no expectation of throwing up such a dyke as would turn a historic tide from overflowing [their] region as had submerged the others in the land" (according to Ransom), they did seek "to frame . . . a philosophy of life, in which both economics and art would find their natural places and not be dissociated into abstract means and ends."³

But within the group itself separations on particular issues appeared, symbolic of a more fundamental split: would government planning or laissez-faire individualism best contribute to the realization of the good life predicated on the wide distribution of small farms? Should the historic Southern separation of races be allowed to persist as a prerogative

¹ Ibid., p. 27.

² "A Traditionist Looks at Liberalism," Southern Review, I (Spring, 1936), 742.

³ Davidson, "Regionalism in the Arts," The Attack on Leviathan, p. 93.

jealously guarded by states' rights supporters? Is agrarianism necessary for the flourishing of the arts? Does a technologically oriented society ipso facto produce dehumanized, dichotomized men in a disintegrating society? John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Herman Clarence Nixon, Henry Blue Kline, and Frank L. Owsley were answering "no" to some of these questions. By the 1940's the group-spirit had begun to dissolve, and the fine glow of mutuality and enthusiasm for their Agrarian cause as originally envisioned in I'll Take My Stand had waned. Physical separation was symbolic of philosophical divergencies: one decade after the publication of the symposium only Davidson and Owsley remained at Vanderbilt. Ransom had left for Kenyon College in 1937; for him Agrarianism was replaced by an absorbing interest in literature and criticism. To Allen Tate he wrote:

It seems to me that our cue would be to stick to literature entirely. There's no decent consistent group writing politics; if there is, it belongs to Collins; our own group will be less and less productive; and the pains of balancing righteousness against expediency . . . make the whole job of doing a political quarterly cost more than it is worth. In the severe field of letters there is vocation enough for us: in criticism, in poetry, in fiction.
[November 4, 1937]

Most of the Agrarians by the end of the thirties had turned to other fields and other climes, seeking means more appropriate to their interests and talents by which to make possible the effective survival of humane values in an increasingly materialistic industrial urbanized world. They continued to hope and write individually for the need that had first brought them together as a group: "making a civilization [rather than] just going along with a shabby culture."¹

¹Ransom, Fugitives' Reunion, p. 60.

Paradoxes of Agrarianism

Agrarian bastions were vigorously attacked; some were highly vulnerable. The occasional note of nostalgia and sentimentality, for example, became for critics an obvious invitation to describe the Agrarians as "twelve Canutes" whose "nostalgia for vanished institutions [was] to cry down the wind," whose remedies were "hortatory," whose desire to return to a past by giving up the trappings of modern civilization was an expression of a "fond silly hope for innocence recaptured." But these were immediate, surface reactions to an anomalous philosophy. On closer examination, other, more fundamental weaknesses of their position became apparent, in some instances the result of their inadequate or uncritical examination of certain assumptions and the realities of twentieth-century life; in others, their failure to perceive that two beliefs they held, two positions they supported, two ways of looking at or treating a situation could result only in a dilemma from which logically and emotionally there was no escape.

Assumptions and Dilemmas

The Agrarians based their program on several assumptions which they apparently considered so self-evident that they neither discussed them nor entertained any contrary ideas as acceptable possibilities. They took for granted, for instance, that a love of the soil is inherent in man; that to separate him from nature is to condemn him to an unnatural, soul-destroying existence. Yet a question might legitimately be raised: Is a devotion to the land an innate human characteristic? Would the vast majority of men, now living in cities, be contented to get along on what they are able to produce or buy with the small profit a farm of one hundred and sixty acres might bring (if it could)? The Agrarians assumed that an agrarian culture, not an urban commercial society, offers terms of life most favorable to the arts. But historically, it has been pointed out, nations whose economy was agrarian have "failed even more dismally than industrial [societies] to foster the

arts, which . . . have been the products of cities rather than the rural regions."¹ R. P. Blackmur, too has noted that "while societies depended upon the land for food . . . and no doubt, for . . . arts, yet their greatest art flowered in their cities. There is hardly an analogue in history," he maintained, "for the belief that an urban society is in itself inimical to art."² Ransom himself has observed that if one is a serious writer, he can be a practising agrarian only with a small garden. Contributions to the arts and sciences, said Charles Beard, came not from serfs, landlords, peasants and land toilers, not from dirt farmers, but from men who had some economic means, education, leisure, an environment offering rich experiences or opportunities to create--all realities in a commercial, industrialized, urbanized culture which provides libraries, an outlet for artistic expression, and the "intellectual friction" on which the arts thrive.³

The Agrarian view of the machine and industrialism has already been thoroughly examined. These Southerners found much to justify their fear of the effects of industrialism--its dehumanization and fragmentation of men, its dissociation of sensibility, its destruction of the enjoyment of labor. And the uncritical faith in "Progress," the admiration of efficiency for its own sake, and a near worship of abstract science--as they interpreted the spirit of the prevailing twentieth-century American way--led them, at times, to reveal an anti-scientific bias which was expressed in a naïve and uncritical attack on the machine and industrialism. Because the method of science permits no authority but proof, no reverence for tradition, no prejudice in favor of the past; because scientific thought and an application of principles discovered through experimentation

¹W. B. Hesseltine, "Look Away, Dixie," Sewanee Review XXXIX (January-March, 1931), 102.

²Psyche in the South, p. 32.

³"Culture and Agriculture," Saturday Review of Literature, V (October 20, 1928), 273.

are said to have produced a technological and materialistically oriented society, the Agrarians turned against both science and industrialism. They did not wish, they said, to eliminate every form of industry, nor were they suggesting that all labor-saving machines, all factories be destroyed by sledge hammers (as Davidson picturesquely characterized the views of critics); but at times their comments were so sweepingly condemnatory that such extreme charges against them could be justifiably made.

Of mechanized farming some Agrarians were understandably suspicious, since the machine had become a necessity for the successful raising of the single crop. It was, in their view, the importation of the alien factory system, suggesting farming "by wealthy individuals, by corporations, or by cooperative enterprise." As Nixon put it, "the steel mule ever threatens to plow [the individual farmer] under."¹ Yet some mechanization was necessary if the individual farmer was to survive. Here was another dilemma for the Agrarians. Although industrialization was seen by most of them as a threat to the way of life they considered infinitely superior, the fact is that in important respects industrialism has proved both good and necessary for agriculture: it has, as Nixon noted, furnished a market for farmers; it has made it possible for them to secure working equipment and to enjoy physical comforts not otherwise obtainable; it has been an outlet for the surplus population of farms; and it has served to cushion the economic collapse of cotton tenancy.² Agriculture, it would appear, is as dependent on industrialism as industrialism historically was on agriculture. The advantages and superiority of agrarianism are not so one-sided as Agrarian pronouncements would suggest.

The Agrarians also inveighed against science and its abstractionism, against its aim to "study the object to see how

¹ Forty Acres and Steel Mules, p. 8.

² Ibid., pp. 45-46.

[to] ring out of it . . . physical satisfaction." "Science," said Ransom, "belongs to the economic impulse and does not free our spirits; its celebrated virtue is due to its position on the economic scale, well distanced from the maw and the mouth of actual red appetite, while its technique is precisely the same."¹ The simplification and uncritical negativism recognizable in some Agrarian pronouncements are represented in Mrs. Fletcher's summary of her husband's attitude:

He admired Blake, he said, because Blake could hate scientists such as Newton. And how could anyone presumably equipped with a brain speak of machinery being the basis of civilization? Art was on the side of the angels, but the machine age had no right to exist, since it failed to contribute anything to human culture. We were speeding forward to a new smash-up or we were speeding backward to the cave-age, but no one seemed to care, he felt, as long as we were going somewhere.²

Frank Owsley's recent explanation of the Agrarian attitude toward science serves both to clarify and to suggest that the group might be charged with having succumbed to the same sin--in characterizing science--as they found in the scientists: abstractionism (in the guise of generalization). The Agrarians, Owsley wrote in 1956,

. . . did not repudiate the abstractionism of science in that they repudiated the knowledge and discoveries of science. Perhaps it was the smug omniscience of the sciences that was scornfully rejected, the contempt of the scientists for philosophy and religion, and their general attitude that they held the secrets of the universe in a test tube. . . . [The group] distrusted the application of abstract principles by the abstractionists. The abstractionist has no respect for experience, for "reality," for the possibility that his abstract principle may be unsound.³

Unfortunately for the strength of their position, the Agrarians were not always careful to distinguish between the

¹"A Poem Nearly Anonymous, II," American Review, I (September, 1933), 458-59, 463.

²Charlie May Simon, Johnswood, p. 67.

³Letter to Virginia Rock, May 30, 1956.

machine and the effects of the machine; between industry, industrialism, and an industrial society; between science and technology. Nor did their dualistic mode of thought, their clusters of paired alternatives--each half clearly treated as good or bad--soundly reinforce the foundation of their philosophical structure. Man's service to a machine, they believed, is artificial, unnatural, enslaving, and therefore spiritually debilitating; but his living and working close to nature are natural activities, aesthetically and morally rewarding: "[The farmer] does not suffer the spiritual sterilization, and often the physical, which comes from the modern technique of factory and city labor: the dissociation between work and the life of the senses, where work is a necessary evil, and pleasure is to be bought with a part of its wages."¹ Yet the land can and has enslaved man as surely as the machine; nature as well as the assembly line can reduce him to a drying husk, a working thing whose sensibilities are dulled by the necessity to expend all his energies in earning enough to exist. Are the mind, the imagination, the creativity expressed in scientific discoveries less "natural" to man than the physical powers and spiritual creativity experienced in the cultivation of fields, the curing of meat, and the harvesting of crops?

Agrarian economics were criticized as a point of vulnerability--and justifiably so. Central to their system was their antiquated view of property, a retreat to an aspect of classical economics; real property, they felt, was tangible property--that is, land. The small farm, said Lytle, "is the norm by which all real property may be best defined." It imparts to the individual, economic independence; to the State a sure foundation for liberty and security. The explication of how this economy works reveals the naïveté of their concept and the idealization through simplification of its effects:

The man who owns a small farm has direct control over the life-giving source, land. The three prime necessities, food, shelter, and clothing, he may command because he has

¹"The Small Farm Secures the State," Who Owns America?, pp. 244-45.

a small inexhaustible capital. . . . Since the family's living is made by the family by itself, the small-farm economy, unlike the larger commercial farm, has less to do with the forces of trade. . . . It is not possible to distinguish the needs of the flesh, the sense, and the spirit, for when the farmer thinks of making a good living for his family, this good living means physical, sensory, and spiritual welfare.¹

If it had not also been true that there were other forms of property to reckon with--for example, securities, giant corporations, utilities²; if through the 1930's American culture in its economic, political, and social character had been moving toward diversification rather than collectivization, then the Agrarian vision of creating a nation with an economy dominated by the small, independent farmer might have been transformed into a reality.

The Agrarian hope was admirable. But there were realities the group did not reckon with adequately: by the mid-thirties nearly seventy-five per cent of the farmers in the South were sharecroppers or tenants, with eighty per cent of these Negroes; sharecropping which was increasing yearly was in reality a subtle form of enslavement rather than a step toward farm ownership; at this time the mass of Southern sharecroppers in cotton country could no longer manage to be even moderately efficient with the proverbial forty acres and a mule, and "independent small tracts [were] inadequate except in special cases or on some cooperative basis."³ In the face of these realities, the representative Agrarian view seems quixotic: it glorified the joys of working the land and running a farm with as few mechanical aids as possible, lest one be corrupted

¹ Ibid., pp. 238 ff.

² The inadequacy of the Agrarian concept of property has been pointed out by a number of critics, most notably by representatives at the Second Southern Policy Conference in 1936 (see pp. 366-67 above) and by R. P. Blackmur in Psyche in the South, pp. 12 ff.

³ H. C. Nixon, Forty Acres and Steel Mules, pp. 5-6.

into raising money crops and fooled into thinking he can control nature.

To improve the state of the farmer in the South required more than Lytle's highly effective deploring of the impact of industrialism on the farmer in I'll Take My Stand or his encomiastic description of agrarian self-sufficiency in Who Owns America? If H. C. Nixon's later analysis and suggestions had prevailed as the representative Agrarian view and had been acted upon in the political arena, the description of the group as romantic aristocrats nostalgically longing for a return to the Old South would have been discarded. For Nixon observed in 1938:

There must be more than internal planning and action. The reconstruction should be accomplished through democratic leadership and democratic participation, with a broader suffrage for underdog protection. The planning should be coordinated with a constructive policy, and policy implies a role in the nation and in the world. . . . The South must be regional, national, and international with reference to cotton and many other things. Neither regional planning nor community planning is enough to give farmers or farm villages a just place in the economic picture.¹

Like Nixon, Frank Owsley realized the need for governmental planning on a national scale to render the agrarian ideal a reality, that is, to enable "the agrarian population and the people of the agricultural market towns . . . [to] dominate the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the State and give tone to it."² But his proposals in "The Pillars of Agrarianism," calling for resettling people on the land, for enforcing programs designed to rehabilitate the soil, for subsidizing the production of cotton and tobacco to repay the South for its tariff-induced loss of income--all implied the adoption of means certain to negate some of the most cherished principles of Agrarianism: large-scale planning necessarily would result in the loss of some individual rights--

¹ Ibid., p. 90.

² "The Pillars of Agrarianism," p. 531.

considered sacrosanct to the self-sufficient subsistence farmer; the centralization required for efficacious administration of programs designed to improve the lot of the farmer would have completely undermined the Agrarian structure of a South operating politically on the principle of local or regional autonomy.¹

Here, then, was one fundamental dilemma: temperamentally opposed to anything that would infringe upon the rights of individuals, jealous of values inhering in the South's sectional character, the Agrarians found themselves confronted with choosing between two programs--one that would exalt the individual to the point of near independence of the state and of a money-oriented national economy; the other which could, almost by fiat, create conditions conducive to the development of an agrarian economy, but which would also--by the controls it would have to impose--destroy this central Agrarian value.² The view ultimately surviving as "Agrarian" was the rejection of government action:

¹Both Davidson and Owsley argued for the regional organization of government. Based on ideas presented by William Yandell Elliott, a former Fugitive who had long since parted company with the economic views of his Nashville friends, the plan would have changed drastically the entire structure of the federal government, would have given regions much more direct control in determining tariffs, and would have enacted into law the principle of nullification by permitting a region to be exempted from the operation of the tariff until an agreement could be reached. Owsley felt there was a need for more local autonomy because of differences in economic, social, and racial interests. (See Davidson, "Federation or Disunion: The Political Economy of Regionalism," The Attack on Leviathan, pp. 102-128; and Owsley, "The Pillars of Agrarianism," pp. 543-47.)

²Lytle voiced the historic suspicion of centralized government's participation in the life of the individual, particularly of the farmer's, when he wrote in 1934: "That nation which abuses its farmers is committing suicide, and when it becomes necessary for a government agent to feed a landed tenant and dictate how much or how little his land will produce, the condition of that nation is desperate."--"John Taylor and the Political Economy of Agriculture," American Review, III (September, 1934), 437.

"Planning" in . . . national-regional terms . . . can only mean the subordination of everything to economics. . . . Planning . . . sets the organization against the organism and is incapable of making organization obedient to organism. A planned economy or a planned society is a contradiction in terms. If society is an organism, then planning is anti-social. . . . The reason . . . why none of us can say how regional reforms ought to take effect, and what specific "instrumentation" they ought to have, is that so many of us, though desiring the culture, are caught in the civilization. We live, though often quite feebly, as organisms; but we are allowed to think only as if we were organizations. When organism again triumphs over organization, then, like the Fathers of the Republic, we shall be able to shape our government to fit what we are rather than what a money system says we ought to be.¹

As a result of this emphasis, whether by choice or by default is not important, the Agrarians condemned to a still-born existence a program intended to save men for the good life, a life that would render them "free, independent, economically immortal."²

Underlying this vision was the unexamined assumption that "individualism goes with agrarianism and collectivism with industrialism,"³ that the one is good, the other bad. Such an assumption, Professor W. T. Couch observed, is unwarranted:

The truth . . . is that an anarchic individualism has dominated both agriculture and industry, and while the institutions of collective action--of government, of religion, of education, and of business--have grown enormously, their purposes have been warped and bent to anarchic ends until half the nation has been brought to ruin.⁴

The Agrarian supposition that individualism is, in and of itself, worthy of preservation at all costs is no more self-evidently justified than the assumption that collective decisions are sounder because a greater number of persons are involved.

¹Davidson, Review of Howard Odum and Harry Moore's American Regionalism, Free America, II (October, 1938), 20.

²Ransom, "The State and the Land," p. 9.

³"Preface," Culture in the South, p. vii.

⁴Ibid.

As in their treatment of economics, the Agrarians' attitude toward the Negro might be criticized for its inadequate examination of the realities of the grim existence endured by Negroes, whether they were tenant farmers and sharecroppers, factory workers, service personnel, or "help." By the late 1930's the greatest number of Negroes in the South lived where the plantation economy was most fully rooted, where sharecropping was most extensive, and where exploitation was most extreme.¹ Sharply condemned by some commentators for their views on race, the Agrarians, it should be noted, did not treat the issue as something special, something apart from Agrarianism. While their views might be described as paternalistic at best, as uncompassionate at worst, it would be irrelevant in this context to object to them on grounds which the Agrarians themselves did not choose.

On the issue of slavery, several of the Agrarians echoed an ante-bellum defense which appeared in Grayson's The Hireling and the Slave: industrial slavery, it was said, is more vicious, more inhumane than Southern chattel slavery. Such an argument succeeded primarily in begging the question; for the Agrarians never admitted in the symposium that a man is as thoroughly enslaved by a discriminatory system perpetuated by laws as by serving the machine; a Negro is degraded as a man by being denied human and political rights no less than is the factory worker who is reduced to a time-clock card. Spiritual death is as certain for one as for the other.

On their peculiar battlefield, the Agrarians failed to fortify this bastion strongly. Their hope that somehow the issues of discrimination against the Negro and his depressed condition would be resolved to the vanishing point was unrealistic; their plan apparently was that some Negroes (those tenants who have proved themselves "really responsible farmers . . . who know how to take care of the soil and own their own

¹ Grace Lumpkin, The South in Progress (New York, 1940), p. 43.

stock and cattle"¹) should be made proprietors of small farms, thus becoming like white men, self-sufficient yeomen who could sit under their own vine and fig tree. However, the peculiar nature of twentieth-century Negro enslavement--the result of history, social and educational discrimination, and economic poverty--will not be eliminated simply by giving "responsible" Negroes homesteading privileges and economic aid. The percentage of Negroes who would be qualified on the basis of what they had acquired and accomplished as tenants would be small at best. And the bi-racial pattern would have persisted. Lyle Lanier, in a review of John Dollard's Caste and Class in a Southern Town, noted in 1938:

With respect to the Negro problem, the concrete social fact is that the American white people, Northern and Southern, do not as a group desire and will not sanction racial intermixture; nor do they, apparently, propose to be governed by the Negro, as would certainly happen in the South if the principle of majority rule were to prevail. The more intelligent approach would seem to be an attack upon specific problems relating to the welfare of the Negro and other underprivileged Americans. The health, economic status, the educational level, the personal dignity of Negroes in general, are matters which any enlightened American, Southern as well as Northern, would like to see improved. Since the social tendencies in both races seem definitely to point towards an accentuation of the biracial cultural pattern, a realistic conception of the future should seek to postulate social mechanisms which would enrich this pattern for both races.²

Donald Davidson, reviewing the same study, declared:

[The] South knows very well that it derives some advantage, chiefly agricultural and domestic employments, from the Negro's presence. It also knows that the Negro is an economic liability in many ways, and a burden which taxes painfully the South's slim resources. . . . It would be glad to see him have better housing and more money, if such things can be had without impoverishing the already insecure white South.

But--and on this point the South is unrelenting and in

¹Owsley, "The Pillars of Agrarianism," p. 536.

²"Mr. Dollard and the Scientific Method," Southern Review, III (Spring, 1938), 672.

all likelihood immovable--it will not support a program of improvement that implies a change of status; in particular, any equality that implies race amalgamation.¹

The support of a class-caste structured society understandably gave the Agrarian program a bad odor among liberal critics. And comments like John Gould Fletcher's--

We are determined, whether rightly or wrongly, to treat [the Negro] as a race largely dependent upon us and inferior to ours. . . We believe that under our system the great majority of the race are leading happy and contented lives. But our system, we admit, has one defect. If a white woman is prepared to swear that a Negro either raped or attempted to rape her, we see to it that the Negro is executed. . . . [However,] we will never accept any solution that comes from the North. Rather than that, we will again take up arms in our cause. . . . I believe I am speaking on behalf . . . of an overwhelming majority of the Southern people today²--

certainly did not help the Agrarian cause.

Allen Tate's relating of the status of Negroes to the Agrarian "solution" reveals an inherent weakness of the program

I argue it this way: the white race seems determined to rule the Negro race in its midst; I belong to the white race; therefore I intend to support white rule. Lynching is a symptom of weak, inefficient rule; . . . [and] will disappear when the white race is satisfied that its supremacy will not be questioned in social crises. To tempt the Negro to question this supremacy without first of all giving him an economic basis is sentimental and irresponsible. Since a majority of the Negroes are in the South, and a majority of these on the land, it is a matter of simple realism to begin the improvement of their condition as farmers. Improvement here depends upon the general improvement of agriculture, upon the rediscovery of the agrarian economy (which the Negro has never quite forgotten), the ground of a prosperity that should lead to his purchase of land.³

¹"Gulliver with Hay Fever," American Review, IX (Summer, 1937), 169-70.

²"Is This the Voice of the South?" [Letter on the Scottsboro trial] Nation, CXXXVII (December 27, 1933), 734,735.

³"A View of the Whole South," American Review, II (February, 1934), 424-25.

This seems a long way around to the improvement of the life and status of the Negro, and so vague as to lead to the conclusion that most Negroes in the South would have remained economically dependent, hence unable to purchase land; consequently, they would have continued to be unhappy, dissatisfied--states of mind which the whites would regard as a questioning of their supremacy. The Agrarian "solution" is a perpetuation of the same denials to Negroes of their right to realize their potential as human beings. In the words of Harry Ashmore they are "robbed by their slum heritage [and this can be an agrarian as well as an urban slum] of the heart and the skills for a fight against the odds."¹ Arguments have been advanced, of course, that Agrarian assertions and analyses of this problem are plausible and justifiable, that the South could and would have handled the matter of slavery without Northern intervention and the Civil War; that the relationship between Negroes and whites in the South was more personal than in the North and therefore more human; that the North also has its caste system and discriminations against the Negro. But the implications of certain Agrarian views, the vagueness of the comments on both the realities of Negro existence and the implementation of the program would suggest that improvement of the Negro's economic and social status through Agrarianism as a way of life would probably never have become a reality. H. C. Nixon in a letter to the New York Times suggested that the Negroes' real hope for a political voice (which seems related to economic improvement) lies in the city: "Urban Negroes cannot go to the countryside for political justice. The city is their hope of democracy."² If one accepts the premise that because the Agrarians are Southern, their prejudice is understandable and therefore to be condoned, their "solution" might seem logical. But they are also--as they themselves would agree--Americans; more, they would establish

¹An Epitaph for Dixie (New York, 1958), p. 77.

²"Letters to the Editor," February 12, 1956.

for men a humane aesthetic creed. To admit, as one of the most liberal of the group has done, that given the realities of the situation in the South, an Agrarian culture would not alone permit the Negro to realize his political rights seems to me irrefutable evidence that Agrarianism, as envisioned by the Twelve, could not assimilate its view of race with the most fundamental aspect of its faith--a man's right and need to realize his humaneness. This, I believe, is the Agrarians' most disturbing and significant failure. Even if their later program seeking to make possible a more humane culture had been sound in terms of economics, its myopic view of race would have resulted in a perpetuation of a separate--and therefore unequal--society. The most cherished of human rights--the right to be considered and treated as a human being equal to any other human being--could not have been realized.

Agrarian Utopian-Conservatism: Implications

Yet a broader and more fundamental paradox in the Agrarian position existed: the group in its general economic, religious, political, and social views was at once conservative and utopian. To argue, as some critics have, that logically the Agrarians could not be both is beside the point: their conservatism has been self-defined; their utopianism is implicit, not only in their program but in their treatment of time, in their view of history, in their desire to re-establish an organic, holistic culture.

"Conservatism," said Andrew Lytle, is "natural to all land-loving people." But conservatism, as he and other members of the group understood it, did not mean a fear of change: "That is stasis and the trouble with all conservatism in the past. There's bound to be change, modification with each generation, but change doesn't need to be revolutionary, and in terms of the basic institutions."¹ The distinctiveness of their conservatism lies in their desire to preserve these basic institutions--the family, a structured society, the decentralized

¹ Letter to Virginia Rock, September 1, 1956.

state which would support wide ownership of private property, and constitutional restraints against large industry or the Leviathan state. The wide discussion in the 1950's which was accorded conservatism as a philosophy, an attitude, a spirit animating political behavior, a way of life, or an interpretation of social evolution helps to make clear how fully and in what respects the Agrarian views foreshadowed the "new conservatism."¹ Thoroughly Burkean on two basic principles--in repudiating mere theory or metaphysics as a means of

¹The temptation is great at this point to discuss briefly "conservatism" and "liberalism" in the contexts of history, philosophy, and political theory (from Burke to manifestations in the American scene--beginning with John Adams, commenting on the rural conservatism of John Taylor, the constitutional conservatism of Calhoun, and the economic conservatism of the gospel-of-wealth ideologies. However relevant such commentary might prove to be, I have firmly, albeit doubtfully and reluctantly, resisted the teasing twistings of this labyrinthine path. Instead, I list here articles and books which were most helpful in illuminating and directing my understanding of these multi-faceted concepts as they are represented above: Herbert Agar, "The Task for Conservatism," American Review, III (April, 1934), 1-22; William Barrett, "What Is the Liberal Mind?" Partisan Review, XVI (March, 1949), 331-36; Julian P. Boyd, "The Relevance of Thomas Jefferson for the Twentieth Century," American Scholar, XXII (Winter, 1952-53), 61-76; Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (New York, 1955); John Calhoun, A Disquisition on Government, Works, I (New York, 1855); T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and Orthodoxy," American Review, II (March, 1934), 513-28; Gordon Harrison, Road to the Right--The Tradition and Hope of American Conservatism (New York, 1954); Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America (New York, 1955); Richard Hofstadter, American Political Tradition (New York, 1954); Russell Kirk, The Conservative Mind (Chicago, 1953); "The Liberal Mind: Two Communications and a Reply," Partisan Review, XVI (June, 1949), 649-65; Robert McCloskey, American Conservatism in the Age of Enterprise (Cambridge, Mass., 1951); Reinhold Niebuhr, "Liberalism: Illusions and Realities," New Republic, CXXXIII (July 4, 1955), 11-13; Clinton Rossiter, Conservatism in America (New York, 1955); Bernard Schilling, Conservative England and the Case against Voltaire (New York, 1950), and "Conservatism and the Critical Movement" [ms.] paper read at the M.L.A., December, 1951; Mulford Sibley, "Burke and the New Ancestor Worship," New Republic, CXXXIV (March 12, 1956), 24-25; Peter Stanlis, "Burke's Politics and the Law of Nature," unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1951; Francis G. Wilson, The Case for Conservatism (Seattle, 1951).

understanding and evaluating any past or existing situation and in extolling tradition as a guide--the Agrarians in I'll Take My Stand and in other partisan presentations enunciated doctrines and convictions which have been described by scholars and political theorists as canons of conservative thought; those most commonly named are a defense of property rights as a basis of freedom and democracy; a disavowal of rule by a mere numerical majority; an espousal of an elitist doctrine (except in a spiritual context in which, to the conservative, the only true equality is found); a belief in a moral order in the universe; a distrust of human nature; an appeal to constitutionalism; a belief that the power of the central government should be limited.

Yet, by the 1930's economic and political storms were whirling across the Southern landscape; as Nixon pointed out in 1932, industrialization, shifts in population, and different agricultural practices resulted in a changing political philosophy for the South: the laissez-faire philosophy embodied in the ante-bellum plantation economy was transferred to industry, and the historic devotion to states' rights was threatened by the spirit of industrial progress and the need for federal aid. Yet, according to James Kilpatrick in The Lasting South, this region's political tradition has consistently been its "abiding, unyielding opposition to centralism and to the dead hand of the impassive State. In terms of constitutional exposition, we know it as the doctrine of States' Rights."¹ Calhoun formulated it into the doctrine of the concurrent majority, and Davidson, Lytle, and Owsley advanced it through adaptations in critical reviews and articles or wrote approvingly of it as a means of preserving sectional character and values. Davidson labeled it a new Federalism (or an old Federalism restored, if a fair balance between industry and agriculture should be re-instated); its character and purpose are clearly conservative: to give regional commonwealths

¹"Conservatism and the South," p. 193.

. . . power to tax or at least to regulate "foreign" capital and enterprises that attempt national monopoly; . . . power to safeguard educational systems against the rule of external interests and of propaganda aimed at the very life of regional cultures; power for the South to preserve its bi-racial system without the furtive evasion of raw violence to which it is now driven when sniped at with weapons of Federal legality; power for the Far West and the Southwest to do likewise with their own race problems; . . . and power for the Northeast to protect its union labor against Southern cheap labor.¹

Their conservatism is made apparent also in their negative views of liberalism. Identified with industrialism and abstractionism, with a support of externally imposed humanitarian reforms--the result of an unwillingness to await changes which develop naturally out of the situation--the liberal rules out the validity of absolutes; Tate charged, even in ages thought to be directed by absolutes; he misreads and misrepresents the traditionist by accusing him of "using a capital T--of making a quality of an abstraction." But the traditionist possesses a quality of judgment and of conduct rooted in a concrete way of life that demands constant rediscovery; Tate's frank defense of the "perfect traditional society" describes it as "an imperative of reference--not as an absolute lump to be measured and weighed," a society which "has always existed, and will continue to haunt the moral imagination of men. . . . The traditional society cannot be envisaged as a mechanical, scientific absolute," declared Tate, "and that is why the modern liberal historian, erecting it into the fictitious absolute that we have seen, can easily discredit it."² It is the liberal, the Agrarians believed, who is a victim of abstractions, of dry, purely intellectual thinking: "American liberalism," Warren wrote, "in general has lacked the historical sense."³

¹"Federation or Disunion," The Attack on Leviathan, p. 126.

²"A Traditionist Looks at Liberalism," pp. 738 and 743.

³"T. S. Stribling: a Paragraph in the History of Critical Realism," American Review, II (February, 1934), 476.

When they explicitly attacked liberalism, the Agrarians associated it with the rise of a technological, capitalistic, urban society; one of its most disturbing effects--and here their temperamental or natural conservatism¹ comes to the fore--was its tendency to produce a dynamic and rapidly changing order. Tate wrote to Fletcher in 1927 that while Parrington's Main Currents in American Thought seemed very good (it had just been published), he felt that it lacked real values; enlightened though the work's liberalism was, he found contemporary Liberalism difficult to understand, unlike the Liberalism in Jefferson's time with which he could sympathize: "Then it was only a differentiation within a single attitude. . . . I think Jefferson would be something like a conservative today; I say 'something like' because the agrarian parties are today so conservative that they are radical."²

Indeed, the implications of some of Jefferson's utterances proved for certain of the Agrarians disturbing or discomfiting, as they themselves confessed obliquely and as a juxtaposition of their reactions to Calhoun's beliefs clearly suggests. The elements of the Jeffersonian state which the Agrarians accepted as part of the South's heritage have already been commented on at length: faith in the yeoman farmer; desire that the United States remain a nation whose economy is determined by the widespread ownership of private property, chiefly in the form of small farms; and defense of the sovereignty of individual states. But Jefferson's more optimistic view of human nature,³ his warning against the dangers of

¹ A natural conservative has been described as one who believes that when it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change.

² June 11, 1927.

³ Jefferson's concept of human nobility and perfectibility serves as the dramatic motif of Warren's later Brother to Dragons; in his introduction to the "tale in verse and voices" Warren wrote in 1953: "If the moral shock to Jefferson caused by the discovery of what his own blood was capable of [the impelling action of the drama is the butchering of a slave by Jefferson's two nephews, Lilburn and Isham Lewis] should turn out to be somewhat short of what is here represented, subsequent events in the history of America, of which Jefferson is the spiritual father, might still do the job" (p. xi).

appealing to or preserving the past for its own sake ("the earth belongs to the living and not the dead"); liberal implications of his views on various social and political issues (race, education, democracy, and universal suffrage) served to create doubts among some of the more conservative Agrarians about how Jeffersonian they really were. Two avenues appeared open to them and they ventured down both: by suggesting that Jefferson was not so liberal as the liberals represent him; and by emphasizing certain aspects of the Jeffersonian faith--some they reinterpreted; others they questioned. Liberals, Davidson noted, pass over certain features of Jefferson's doctrine and stress others: "his fight on the established church, his anti-slavery principles, his scheme for selective public education." But, concluded Davidson,

It is impossible to conceive a Jefferson who would argue abstractly for freedom and tolerance against the background of a highly centralized government and the industrial economics which the Southern liberals half accept and half reject. The essential Jefferson of political and economic theory is not the parental ancestor of men who seek consolidation in government and at the same time despise the farmer.¹

Occasionally a statement appearing in an Agrarian review seems strikingly close to outright repudiation; maintaining that Jefferson's "line" in the Declaration of Independence was an abstraction, Lytle argued that "Jefferson's political philosophy [proved] to be inadequate" for changing circumstances and his strategy worse:

The weak point in Jefferson's defense was his own belief in a distorted conception of property, . . . landed property and the kind of life it supported. . . . Much of

¹"The Dilemma of the Southern Liberals," American Mercury, XXXI (February, 1934), 228. This essay appeared in The Attack on Leviathan; it was slightly revised and the changes result in a characterization of Jefferson more appropriate to Davidson's view of Agrarianism. The sentence, "It is impossible, . . ." does not appear and "men who seek consolidation in government . . ." becomes "modern Southern liberals who worship 'consolidation' and who are likely to think of farmers as 'yokels' until they become proletarians and join a union." (p. 267)

Jefferson's special legislation--especially the abandonment of primogeniture and the separation of Church and State--contradicted his general idea and obstructed the establishment of the agrarian State.¹

And Tate's short Reporter-like poem in form strikes a tone, though lightly, of wry skepticism about Jefferson:

On the Father of Liberty

Jefferson had many charms;
Was democratic; still--and yet
What should one do? The family arms
On coach and spoon he wisely set
Against historical alarm;
For quality not being loath,
Nor quantity, nor the fame of both.²

One escape from this predicament was to find other Southern political heroes--and two were natural choices, John Taylor and John C. Calhoun. Taylor was unmistakably an agrarian with proper conservative instincts although Lytle felt they were coupled with liberal intellectual principles. The most consistent and clear-minded of the Virginia dynasty, said Lytle, Taylor was "the political prophet who ignored the Wilderness; Calhoun the Messiah who should not have had to consider it." It was "tragic that [Taylor, Randolph and Macon] were unable to discipline Jefferson. . . . Taylor's principles and his analysis of the evil forces working like false yeast in the wine of American life became the complete guides for future conservative action."³

But it was Calhoun who appeared to some of the group as a kind of spiritual father. In his views and principles they found much to admire or support: his strong conservatism manifested in the conviction that social continuity should be preserved; his beliefs that unchecked majority rule would lead

¹"The Backwoods Progression," American Review, I (September, 1933), 414 ff.

²Sewanee Review, XXXVIII (January-March, 1930), 60.

³"John Taylor and the Political Economy of Agriculture, Part II," American Review, III (October, 1934), 638.

to oppression of the minority, that the South as a minority section had long been exploited and should preserve its integrity through the doctrine of the concurrent majority, that state sovereignty--the basic feature of the federal government--should be utilized to resist the drive toward centralization.¹

The Agrarian focus was clearly bifurcated, and thus provided a basis for certain of the more denunciatory criticism of the group's position. The confusion, implications, and conclusions resulting from this Janus-like Jefferson-Calhoun split were epitomized perfectly at the Fugitive Reunion in 1956 when Tate, Ransom, Warren, Davidson, Lytle, and Owsley conversed informally about the causes, activities, and effects of their efforts as social critics. Ransom noted that their views were then enjoying "a certain revival" as a result of the reprinting of the symposium² and the hearing it was getting from conservative historians and politicians. Mr. Clinton Rossiter, he noted, had called on him to clarify certain matters:

He wanted to know what sort of economy we represented, or what sort of view of the Republic we represented. I said decidedly the Jeffersonian. He was very much relieved at that, because we had been charged with being Fascist--notably by Sherwood Anderson.

Tate: Disciples of Calhoun.

Ransom: Yes.³

¹ Anne Ward Amacher in "Myths and Consequences: Calhoun and some Nashville Agrarians," South Atlantic Quarterly, LIX (Spring, 1960), 251-64, gives a detailed analysis of Tate's, Lytle's and Owsley's views of Calhoun. Charging that they misread and misrepresented Calhoun's doctrines and that their image of him was "somewhat romantic and . . . inaccurate in several points," she attacks these Agrarians in particular for the implications of what she calls unjustified assumptions: that Calhoun advanced the medieval notion of an objective religious authority in forming an organic society; that he advocated a society of relatively fixed classes and was thus the foe of government support of technological and industrial expansion. Further, their failure to consider what he meant by "interests" when they called his doctrine of concurrent majorities a "theory of democratic action" was a serious flaw in their presentation, she argues.

²I'll Take My Stand was reissued by Peter Smith, principally a library supplier, who printed 500 copies in 1951.

³Fugitives' Reunion, p.211.

That the term "conservative" is ambiguous and subject to many interpretations is apparent. To the extent one sees the Agrarians as wishing to break the chain of historical continuity and to reinstate the values they found inherent in an ante-bellum agrarian South, they might be--and have been--called reactionary. In another sense, they are radicals, revolutionaries--as Tate's rather puzzling remarks at the end of his symposium essay suggest: A Southerner, he declared, can take hold of his tradition only by violence; "reaction is the most radical of programs." Francis G. Wilson sets up the conservative and revolutionary at opposite ends of the political spectrum but observes, nevertheless, that when certain given values--which conservatives would defend within the framework of the tension of political conflict--are at stake, "the conservative can even become a revolutionary."¹ A change in metaphor may be appropriate: By re-forming the spectrum into a circle the radical of the left and the reactionary of the right meet at the point of revolutionary means; both may propose to end the existing order by violence. The radical looks to an undetermined future, the reactionary to a lost past. And insofar as their proposals are based "with little regard for the complexities and varieties of real society upon what they think ought to be rather than upon the collective experience of mankind"² they are also utopian.

The Agrarian symposium thus clearly belongs to utopian literature. It describes a particular state or community, and its theme is implicitly concerned with the body politic of that state, qualities which are characteristic of all utopian literature.³ Like other utopias, the Agrarians' projection emerged

¹The Case for Conservatism, p. 2.

²Charles M. Andrews, "Introduction," Ideal Empires and Republics (New York, 1901), p. vii.

³With slight adaptations, these were the criteria set forth by Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick in The Quest for Utopia, p. 3.

from their own historic period, but it represented at the same time "a real effort to escape any restraints of historical time and place."¹ Along with their tendency to plan a society which failed to consider adequately existing institutions and prevailing economic conditions, this was the characteristic of their program which unmistakably rendered them true speculative utopians, seeking to re-form and improve society.

Obviously, the Agrarians may be called utopian on various levels. Although the group was vulnerable to the superficial charge that they were visionary idealists because their proposed state seemed impossible of realization, their hope for a holistic culture a fantasy, their account of agrarian life a romantic fiction--still their program does not deserve dismissal on these grounds. For such criticisms imply a wholly negative view of utopian thinking, a view not self-evidently valid since it appears to be based on the assumption that only the possible, only that which is realizable in the imminent future is good or worthy of consideration. Yet utopias have represented the noblest aspirations of man: "Ideals of . . . the past are the realities of the present; . . . ideals today will be the realities of the future. Utopia is the society of the future."²

Some critics, in directing their attention to the contemporary scene, rejected Agrarian philosophy on these grounds; the program, when one was finally evolved, it was said, never had a practical effect.³ Although this charge is demonstrably

¹Ibid., p. 4.

²Ibid., p. 8.

³Owsley, however, felt that the symposium was effective; he noted a "tremendous impact in certain circles . . . numerous members of the Catholic clergy became keenly interested and joined in the movement and at least one Catholic paper with a very large number of subscribers contributed many articles of discussion." Owsley reported considerable correspondence with Senator John Bankhead "who read some if not all of our writings on the subject, and he was in agreement with the principles, though not the exact methods set forth in my 'Pillars of Agrarianism' and it probably had some bearing on his sponsoring the Bankhead-Jones Act. . . ." ("A Symposium: The Agrarians Today," p. 27.)

true--if by "practical" the critics meant, for instance, the halting of the industrialization of the South including the mechanization of farms or the disturbing rise in the number of land tenants, it fails to represent the inherent weaknesses as well as the real values of the Twelve Southerners' brand of Agrarianism. On the one hand, it insufficiently considers the implications of the symposium's character; on the other, it overlooks the logical dilemmas the Agrarians created for themselves: for they sought to project the values from the social order of their reconstructed as-was world of the Old South into the economic order of a New South. By the mid-1930's the real agrarian was less likely to resemble the Jeffersonian yeoman farmer with whom the Twelve had hopefully peopled their I'll-Take-My-Stand world than the share-tenant peasant; often he underwent a metamorphosis into a mill village proletarian; fugitive from the economically deprived agrarian group, he became the factory laborer then viewed by the Agrarians as an unfortunate wage slave.

The nature of Agrarian utopianism is not adequately described as visionary or impractical; it was, rather, a retrogressive utopia. As cultural traditionalists, the Agrarians found their Eden in the ante-bellum past which displayed before their appreciative eyes a utopian unity. Then society was organic rather than mechanistic; then the individual had meaning in his culture, for the social, religious, and aesthetic facets of life took precedence over his economic activity. Like early nineteenth-century utopists, the Agrarians preferred a retrogressive to a progressive utopia, for the retrogressive form usually decried centralization as destructive of values and reaffirmed individual relations as productive of a happy society, while the progressive emphasized centralization as a means of ordering institutional structures of society.¹

However serious the Twelve Southerners were about their

¹ Negley and Patrick, p. 7.

program, their Agrarianism was never to be realized, not chiefly because it was "utopian" but because its utopianism was predicated on a use of the past that removed their program out of the world of history into the sphere of art.¹ Supported by their reading of concrete realities manifested in past Southern history, they lost their sense of contemporary history. Nowhere is the artist's imagination and the utopian character of the group's stand more clearly revealed than in their attitude toward "progress." Their Agrarian myth served as a weapon for attack on another myth--that somehow all change is progress, that the historical process is teleological, that developments and discoveries, especially in science, mean improvement. For the artist, the concept of progress is irrelevant to his creation. "There is development in art, but no progress: . . . the problem of art itself consists not in mastering . . . technical processes but in using them to express the artist's experience and give it reflective form, and consequently every fresh work of art is the solution of a fresh problem. . . ." ² It was this view they applied to the world of past and present history.

An exchange at the Fugitive Reunion between Alfred Starr³ and Donald Davidson, with others joining in, suggested how central the utopian view of time was to their functioning as artists. Arguing that "we may be swimming against the stream that is the real stream of the future," and calling it

¹An analogous bit of evidence that history could--and rightly should--be interpreted and written as art is made explicit in the case of at least one of the Agrarians. Allen Tate, reviewing George Fort Milton's study of Andrew Johnson, declared, "I am approaching 'The Age of Hate' with the assumption that works of history should be works of art. . . . The most striking feature of the book . . . is its closed atmosphere. It is a complete world; it amply testifies to a fine sense of artistic form."--"The Reign of Terror," New Republic, LXVI (February 18, 1931), 24.

²R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford, 1946), p. 330.

³One of the Fugitives, Starr died in 1957.

"the crux of [the] matter,"¹ Starr maintained:

Maybe we are caught up in our objections to modernism simply because we don't like change. We don't like change not only from what we used to know and used to have, but we don't like change from an ideal that we wish we had, maybe an ideal that never existed at all.²

To this charge Davidson responded:

[These perfectly familiar arguments] are mistaken in the idea that we are objecting to change. You are offering essentially the arguments that are contained in Toynbee's analysis of the disintegrating civilization. He reduces it to a conflict between archaists, who of course don't like change and want to jump backward in the stream of time, and the futurists who want to impose upon the present the pattern of the future that has not yet arrived. And that is what all modernists . . . argue, you see. Well now, of course, that's not a climate in which the poet can perform because if we have to change every time science changes its immediate working hypothesis, then we can't produce any poetry at all.³

Thus, their identification with time was replaced by encomiums to timelessness. Because they were determined to preserve the values of a conservative culture which they located in a past time and place, the Agrarians, though proud of their consciousness of history, failed to deal adequately with its contemporary reality. Donald Davidson revealingly and perhaps unconsciously disclosed the Arcadian spirit pervading their world: "The agrarian life is neither a going back nor a going forward. It has nothing to do with the illusion of progress or decadence, it knows nothing of the straight line. Life is a timeless cycle, not a line, and the agrarian life establishes man within that natural cycle where he belongs."⁴

Impelled into defending their view of the South against attack, the Agrarians emerged with a philosophy of conservatism

¹The general issues under discussion were the function of the poet in modern society and the reasons why epic poetry is no longer produced.

²Fugitives' Reunion, p. 50.

³Ibid., p. 51.

⁴"The 'Mystery' of the Agrarians," p. 7.

and a myth of the Old South, celebrated in a "prose poem."¹ The present they viewed from an idealized past, reconstructed through the selection of evidence; the Agrarian symposium and later pronouncements re-created a past and an Old South with few confusions and disorders (the society was organic as they viewed it), and thus their agrarian world became a "poetic image which serves as a repository of values."²

In the world of images there is no time--and hence no history. Although they wrote at length and read widely in material properly characterized as history, basically their Agrarian utopian-conservatism was a-historical; that is, their philosophy and program broke the continuity of history. R. G. Collingwood, late Oxford University professor of philosophy, observed in his Idea of History that if war or capitalism is to be abolished or superseded by something better, we must have a "knowledge of the past[,] conditioning our creation of the future."³ Clearly the Agrarians were aware of the character and effects of the industrial system, yet consciously they sought to prevent the past of the reconstructed, industrializing, urbanizing South from conditioning their creation for the future.⁴ Davidson believed they were "grimly realistic"; they did not flee to New York or Europe but instead "turned to their own land for restoration of spirit. . . ." Through their Agrarian myth, localized in the South before it was--as they believed--infested by industrialism, the Agrarians hoped to destroy the realities of a mechanistic, materialistic modernism. "Behind them," wrote Davidson, "were seventy years and more or tragic Southern history. . . . Before them was the

¹ Henry Nash Smith, "The Dilemma of the Agrarians," p. 218. The reference is to I'll Take My Stand.

² Ibid., p. 226.

³ The Idea of History (Oxford, 1946), p. 334.

⁴ John Crowe Pansom remarked in 1956, "In prose we took after an ideal society which we knew was a lost cause."--Fugitives' Reunion, p. 60.

contemporary South, with its great farms debilitated, absentee-owned, ruined, gone disreputable. From it men fled to cities and factories, also absentee-owned for the most part, where the only difference was that they could be ruined for pay, and could call their disrepute progress." The solution? A rejection of "both the aggrandizing optimism of the Chambers of Commerce and the sentimental optimism of the liberals" and a proposal "to seek again for fundamentals."¹

Unfortunately, a "poetic reconstruction" of the South--the form in which their search for fundamentals was expressed--cannot and would not mitigate the evils of an industrial present when the myth is radically separated from the contemporary scene. The Agrarians themselves, it has been pointed out, reflected their dilemma: when they set forth their vision of the civilization they hoped to re-create--an ordered society of self-sufficient agrarians who daily express an aesthetic and a spiritual, natural relation to man and to God--they resort to myth; they reveal their utopian-conservative character in proposing that this symbolic South, the *arte-bellum* plantation South which, to them, was not imaginary because it was localized in history, "may be brought into being again." A reminiscent glory of an Old South agrarian tradition was made to shine upon the begrimed New South industrial landscape. They transposed "chronological symbols into geographical terms" and thus by concealing "the irrevocability of the passage of time," they came to believe that through the destruction of Northern influence "Southerners might still preserve the emotional values which cluster about the Old South."² On the other hand, when they sought to implement their program, when they offered proposals to improve the miserable lot of the farmers, they had to look away from their myth. Their poetic image would not serve as a blueprint for economic reform, although it was for them an admirable means of attacking

¹"The 'Mystery' of the Agrarians," p. 7.

²H. N. Smith, "The Dilemma of the Agrarians," p. 227.

the ugliness and confusions and complexities of modern civilization.

In their wish to see life simplified, in their view of its realities as paired alternatives, they embody the artist's approach--not the economist's, the historian's, the political scientist's, or the anthropologist's. "Give us Dualism, or we'll give you no Art," Ransom wrote Tate in 1927. Because their treatment in I'll Take My Stand of the economic, social, and political realities was the literary artist's, their utopian-conservative world necessarily remained mythic. As Henry Nash Smith expressed it, "Instead of being firmly rooted in the Southern soil, the Agrarian program for reforming the Southern economy is aerophytic: it has its roots in wishes and dreams."¹

Assessment

With their artist's view of time, the Agrarians condemned their own vision of a holistic agrarian society to an existence whose reality could flower only in the world of the imagination. But it was in this realm that their impact was ultimately made. The core of the Agrarian group remained artists devoted to poetry, to criticism, to the sphere of the aesthetic. Andrew Lytle's assertion at the Fugitives' Reunion that the poet operates at various levels of interest and that when he writes critically as a "man of letters, not as a politician [or] a historian," he produces a creation which is "a continuous kind of operation of the same kind of mind growing into a different kind of air,"² was substantiated by other Agrarians. Tate agreed that "the literary critic doesn't turn on a different mind"; Davidson maintained that "in the order of life . . . we would defend or seek to establish, these things [politics, economics, etc.] are not to be separated if life is to be healthy at all; that the separation of them into

¹ Ibid., p. 232.

² Fugitives' Reunion, p. 179.

specialities under the modern regime is the thing . . . that destroys poetry"; that in I'll Take My Stand they were defending the poet as much as they were writing "an exposition of the case of the South under the Agrarian conception."¹ Ultimately, what the Agrarians hoped to bring about was, as Ransom stated in a different context, "to humanize [the natural man], . . . to complicate his natural functions with sensibility, and make them aesthetic," to create a "proper society" whose object is "to instruct its members how to transform instinctive experience into aesthetic experience."² The means was to reinstate agrarianism as an economy and way of life.

That they would fail now appears self-evident. But the justness of their critique of the idea and effects of progress, particularly in a technological guise, is not subverted by charging that they sought a return to "Cloud Cuckoo Land." In a nation which has produced and has outmoded the Hiroshima "Little Boy" and the Nagasaki "Fat Man" types of atomic bombs, in a world where cobalt-rigged bombs are discarded as obsolete even before they are produced,³ the Agrarian warning that "it is necessary to employ a certain skepticism even at the expense of the Cult of Science" seems remarkably temperate. The Agrarians came to recognize that their original stand had to be modified in the direction of adjusting to the economic, sociological, and political realities; they directed barrages against laissez-faire industrialism and its destructiveness of the humane; they ranged with determination across the Southern landscape hopefully seeking a means by which an agrarian way of life with its values and character of religious humanism--the moral and spiritual condition favorable to art--could be reaffirmed.

And the affirmation came--although not in concrete

¹ Ibid., pp. 180-81.

² "Forms and Citizens," The World's Body, p. 42.

³ Pat Frank, "Hiroshima: Point of No Return," Saturday Review, December 24, 1960, p. 25.

Agrarian proposals, not in economic, sociological, political pronouncements, but in their lives as teachers, in their achievements as artists--their poetry, their fiction, their literary criticism. Allen Tate has noted that some of his best poetry was written in his Agrarian days. Andrew Lytle related his approach in the myth-making process to certain views and assumptions held by the Agrarians. Of The Velvet Horn, he wrote:

I thought I wanted to do a long piece of fiction on a society that was dead. At the time I saw the scene as the kind of life which was the Southern version of a life that . . . had been common everywhere east of the Mississippi and east of the mountains. That life seemed to me to be what was left of the older and more civilized America. . . . The Civil War had destroyed that life; but memory and habit, manners and mores are slow to die.¹

The artist's dualistic view of time is central to his creation:

I now saw my two working parts of the structure: the moving present tense which is the world's illusion, and the eternal present tense which knows nothing of past or future but always is. But the myth and the fairy tale all operate through and represent this sense of the eternal. . . . there is little or no natural landscape, no recognizable cities, in myth or fairy tale. This is the crucial distinguishing feature between myth and fiction which deals with myth. They have archetypes in common, but in fiction, the action must be put in a recognizable place and society.²

In aesthetic theory which evolved into principles of the "new criticism" there are striking parallels to facets of Agrarian faith: form and content should be ordered into an organic unity in a work of art; it should be based upon a tradition; if it is poetry, it deals with the past. Robert Penn Warren in the "Introduction" to the new edition of Understanding Poetry (with Cleanth Brooks) observed that a poem is not to be thought of "as a group of mechanically combined elements"; that "the relationship among the elements is what

¹"The Working Novelist and the Mythmaking Process," Myth and Mythmaking, ed. Henry A. Murray (New York, 1960), p. 141.

²Ibid., p. 152.

is all important," a relationship "far more intimate and fundamental. If we must compare a poem to the make-up of some physical object, it ought not to be a wall but something organic like a plant."¹ For Ransom, poems which are cherished as perfect creations "are dramatizing the past, . . . [building] triumphant monuments somewhere in the superseded past."² The function of art, he believed, was to restrain the predatory acquisitive man; thus, a "technique of art must . . . look just like the technique of fine manners, or of ritual."³

Their view of the organic character of art continued to be representative of the essence of their achievements. The relationship between a Southern context and theme, between the concrete and the universal is superbly rendered in a poem like Ransom's "Antique Harvesters." The polemical note is absent, the reverent respect for the meaning of tradition is perfectly expressed, as the last stanza, added during his Agrarian enthralment, reveals:

True, it is said of our Lady, she ageth.
But see, if you peep shrewdly, she hath not stooped;
Take no thought of her servitors that have drooped,
For we are nothing; and if one talk of death--
Why, the ribs of the earth subsist frail as a breath
If God but wearieth.⁴

Agrarianism, said Robert Penn Warren, was a myth, meant to serve as a fifth column, as poetry is a fifth column.⁵ How fully it has subverted progressive, industrial, scientific values through its aesthetic guise is another book.

¹Third edition (New York, 1960), p. 16.

²"The Tense of Poetry," The World's Body, pp. 247, 251.

³"Forms and Citizens," ibid., pp. 39-40.

⁴Poems and Essays, p. 54.

⁵The occasion on which Warren made this remark was the Fugitives' Reunion. "The effect is slow," he said. "We couldn't step out and take over the powers of the state."--Fugitives' Reunion, p. 216.

CHAPTER IX

CODA

In the Preface to a forthcoming new edition of I'll Take My Stand Louis D. Rubin, Jr. suggests that this Agrarian symposium, published more than thirty years ago, continues to have appeal and validity today not primarily because it was a prophetic document depicting the effects of industrialism in the South but almost for the opposite reason: it invokes an image of a humane life that is perennially valid. Its metaphorical vision offers a meaning that "goes far deeper than the transient issues of economics, politics, social adjustment"¹

Created by Twelve Southerners who regarded their cause as a crusade and who wrote glowingly of agrarian life and traditions as a poet might pay homage to his mistress, this collection of essays was concerned with almost every important aspect of culture: with the arts, social institutions, history, education, economics, religion, political philosophy, and race. While certain of the views expressed in 1930 now seem dated; others mistaken, confused, or quixotic; and a few, perhaps, unfortunately tinged with what has been misleadingly labeled "unconscious fascism," the book nevertheless continues to have a validity subject neither to time nor place.

Its uniqueness was the result of several factors, some accidental, others planned. Vanderbilt and the South served as its seedbed, a technologically and commercially oriented culture was its inhospitable climate, and three

¹"Preface to a New Edition of I'll Take My Stand" (MS), p. 11, quoted by permission of the author and Harper and Brothers.

former Fugitives--soon joined by other poets and Southerners devoted to the social sciences--were its cultivators. It was clearly a group effort, the result of proximity, personal friendships, and a shared respect for the values they found implicit in an agrarian-based culture.

As Fugitives at Vanderbilt, four of them--Tate, Davidson, Ransom, and Warren--had helped to create and publish from 1922-1925 a little magazine devoted to the cause of poetry, and for nearly four years their poems of high technical skill appeared--witty, astringent commentaries which were, along with their criticism, intended to destroy the treacly sentimentality, at that time characteristic of so much of the literature about the South. For this brief period and shortly after the demise of the Fugitive, these four poets were caught up in a critique of their own background and what it produced; they fled from their region's lack of serious devotion to the arts, from "the high-caste Brahmins of the Old South." But their doubts about their heritage were short-lived; their denial of provincialism was a position they found impossible to sustain or to justify emotionally.

Intellectually and spiritually they returned to their region. Their heritage, their devotion to art, the attacks on the South as backward, ignorant, and unliberal, the Scopes trial furor in 1925, the spread of factories and commercialism across their cherished agrarian landscape, and the bland optimism of and glittering promises by New South thinkers--all these factors led Tate, Ransom, and Davidson to propose that something be done for a vanishing way of life which they felt permitted a man to be humane. They appealed to others of like mind--friends, colleagues, other writers--who were willing to devote their considerable talents to an Agrarian cause: through conversations, conferences, and a remarkable exchange of letters they produced both a book metaphorically conceived and a strategy clearly designed to defend an Agrarian Southern way of life while it attacked the prevailing American philosophy of progress enmeshed in a technological, commercial culture.

They took pride in their understanding of the history that had happened to their people. Biographies and interpretations of the Civil War period issued from their pens. Their reading of Southern history, molded and intensified by ancestral experiences, was the soil from which their conservative-utopian myth of an idyllic agrarianism flowered. Their dualisms--science vs. art, industrialism vs. agrarianism, the artificial and mechanical vs. the natural and organic--were weapons for attack and defense. Thus, they not only expressed the tensions of the modern world as they shaped the character and texture of their strategy but they also quite unconsciously embodied the basis for the ultimate failure of their position, which they so vigorously propounded through the 1930's in the symposium, public debates, articles and books. A holistic, organic culture--which emerged in their writings as an image particularized in the Old South--was set forth as an ideal for all America. But such a myth is not achieved simply by inveighing against the dubious effects of an industrial culture, by questioning its values, and thus attempting to subsume the dichotomies into a unified way of life.

The political and economic inadequacies of the group's philosophy, its "simple" approach to contemporary complexities were targets for attack in the 1930's and after. Denounced and ridiculed, the Agrarians persisted in their cause for nearly a decade. Their program was shaped always with the end in mind of achieving and perpetuating humanistic values, although implicitly and unconsciously it was not all-inclusive. As men of letters, they offered a poetic image: man was to be re-created as a whole being, no longer fragmented, specialized, perverted into a thing getting and spending and wasting his powers: society was to achieve an organic unity, permitting, encouraging the enjoyment of life as an aesthetic, spiritual experience.

The Agrarians are utopian-conservatives, believing in and seeking to embody a myth out of a timeless order of man's universal consciousness into a world of history. Their failure

is only too apparent if they are judged in terms of goals achieved in a political and economic context. At first glance Agrarian conservatism would seem to have little in common with Transcendentalist liberalism. But it should be remembered that like the Agrarians⁴, the Transcendentalists' view of progress, of materialistic culture and values failed to halt the development of such overmastering forces in late nineteenth-century society. In other words, the merit or significance of a critique which acquires the qualities of a myth is not always to be determined by the study of the contemporary culture or by projecting possible effects into the near future. The impact of a myth may come much later, serving as a normative value; the concept of government by social compact, based on a state of nature, for example, was never a historical "fact"; yet it served in the eighteenth century and since as an ideal, a mythic creation in which certain fundamental aspects of our democratic faith took root and found nourishment, grew, and finally have begun to flower.

Although Agrarians are most appropriately called regionalists, they are also sectionalists, respectors of a Southern heritage which they sought to quicken and perpetuate for the modern world. But in a deeper, more significant sense they affirmed a faith in a trait identified as unmistakably national, fully American. With the Transcendentalists the Southern Agrarians shared the same stubborn conviction: that the humanity and dignity of the individual are worth fighting for, that a respect for individualism may be more fully realized in an unyielding absolutist position than in a relativistic one. Thoreau and Emerson, identified as great liberals, were nevertheless critical of philanthropic "humanitarians," of the fetish of faith in mere majority rule, of men who serve the state not as men but as machines. By their stubborn insistence on the importance of the majority of one, who serves the cause of all men with his conscience, acting from principle and not from expediency, the Transcendentalists activated a myth: their defense and deepening of the concept of

individualism had served to make unthinkable the idea of a democracy with slavery.

The labels "liberal" and "conservative" are suffused with paradoxes and ambiguities. In the political arena they may appear irreconcilable; in the world of art a reconciliation of opposites is possible. Thoreau's Walden, a scholar recently observed, was "the chief criticism of industrial America written in the Nineteenth Century, I'll Take My Stand . . . the chief criticism in this century."¹ So, too, the Agrarians capitalized on an absolutist stand: individualism was by definition a good and the greatest danger they found in capitalistic economy, which they identified with liberal assumptions, was the evidence that liberal programs and liberal policies, formulated to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number, might destroy--and indeed were on the way to doing so--the most important good, the right and desire of an individual to remain individual.

The results or effects of the myth of agrarianism are not to be found--or even to be sought solely--in measurements made in the recent past or present. They may be detectable a hundred years from now in a realization that but for such critiques as I'll Take My Stand, a technological, scientifically oriented society could have been more inhumane, more fragmentizing, more destructive of aesthetic and spiritual values than it was. We will never really know, since there is no way to measure or to judge what will be before it has become, or what might have been if something had not been. For the present, at least, there has been presented dramatically and metaphorically the agrarian image of the whole man, imperfect and fallible but capable of enjoying the good life, desirous of realizing the potential of his individuality.

High priests to the Goddess of Art, dedicated to the cause of defending a culture which had all but disappeared,

¹Randall Stewart, "The Relation Between Fugitives and Agrarians," Mississippi Quarterly, XIII (Spring, 1960), 58.

taking their stand for sensibility and order, for the concrete and the organic, the Agrarians dramatized the relationship between art and society, between man and his culture. This group effort--an affirmation of aesthetic, religious, and humanistic values--will stand not just as a sectional conservative plea, nor a prophetic warning of the effects of a dehumanizing, materialistic commercial civilization, but as a mythic utopian image, an appeal to men's moral and humane imagination--in essence the poet's vision of a world he would create.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

VERSIONS OF THE MANIFESTO

Articles of an Agrarian Reform

The separate studies in this book were written without much collaboration. Nevertheless, there lay behind them a great deal of discussion among the writers, both in conversation and through correspondence. In the course of this discussion there gradually developed a fairly close agreement upon certain philosophical and economic principles. It was then thought that it might be of interest for the reader to know to what extent the writers formed a single group, and might care to commit their joint faith to a written statement. Therefore the present Articles were drawn up, and signed by all the contributors to this book without exception.

If some of these Articles appear excessively abstract, they will mostly be found illustrated, and even argued in detail, in the studies that follow.

We shall not mind if these Articles are taken as a sort of Credo, to which the undersigned hereby profess their allegiance.

We shall not mind, either, if the present book is taken as but the first of a series of activities in support of the Articles. But, we do not at this moment undertake any specific program of activities.

The Articles follow.

Article 1

The good life must be lived much closer to the land than the ruling American ideal permits. To define it in the concrete terms with which we the undersigned are best acquainted: The good life is of the general kind which is exhibited in the old-fashioned rural communities of the South.

Article 2

Opposed to the Southern way of life is the orthodox American way which may be defined as the industrial way. But the Southern way is historically the elder. The Southern life has some accidental and local features, but fundamentally is just a survival of the historic European ideal, which was once very naturally the American ideal. In defending it against the present American ideal we do not defend anything new, but something that is old if not nearly forgotten. We are not revolutionists but traditionalists. Ours is a doctrine which once informed the American colonies, and the States during the earlier years of the Union. The industrial ideal had most of its development only after the Civil War, and then only among the victors. Fortunately, it prevails unanimously nowhere.

Article 3

At home the Southern ideal has hitherto maintained itself successfully, if somewhat shabbily, following a bitter public defeat. Now it is

being threatened by the new American ideal, under cover of a peaceful industrial invasion. We would defend the Southern ideal even against a generation of Southerners. We are for a cause which is perhaps losing, but not yet lost. To Southerners we make an appeal which is romantic and sectional to this extent--we invite them to remember that they have been identified with a cause which is famous for having been cherished so long in adversity; that the South, even if poverty-stricken, offers the most substantial exhibit of the good life that is still to be found in this country, and that, if they repudiate this exhibit, they will forfeit the one distinction which they as a section possess.

Article 4

But the good life is so much a matter of the will, and depends so little on a local climate and geography, that we solicit the affiliation of sympathetic American communities and persons everywhere. We are preoccupied with the survival of Southern life only in the degree that tactics make the South the immediate battleground. The appeal which we make to our friends at large is as follows:-- Their cause and our cause are the same cause, and it is so precarious a cause that all who are for it must come to a common understanding. We shall define this cause in terms that are general and not local.

Article 5

The ruling American ideal is ordinarily defined in the phrase: Progress. But this means, when we inspect it closely: Industrial Progress. The products of this ideal are such as industrial cities, factories, the unfortunate class known as "labor," machines and standard machine-made commodities, and an artificial way of life whose tempo is both rapid and accelerating. Industrial progressivists assume that it is our destiny to carry on endless hostilities against nature, and to change the physical environment perpetually, and "progressively." This ideal is practicable in the sense that it lies within our power to torture nature, and in so doing to torture ourselves without ceasing. It is impracticable in the sense that it never proposes a specific objective as the goal of the process and the end of hostilities; it initiates the infinite series.

Article 6

To this ideal we oppose the ideal of a life which comes as soon as convenient to terms with nature, and is content with a very imperfect victory over nature. The life thus idealized will be one that is not out of contact with the elemental soil. Its products will be an agrarian economy, a material establishment that will stand and not change incessantly, and a provincial community which is narrow but close as the unit of society. Its benefits, which are spiritual, will consist primarily in peace, stability, and leisure, which seem to be the conditions to any intelligent pursuit of happiness.

Article 7

Among the occupations of leisure are the two pointed ones: aesthetic enjoyment and religious contemplation. Both suffer under serious

disabilities in the industrial climate. We believe that there is no full-blooded aesthetic experience, and consequently no creative art to record this experience, that does not rest emotionally on the love of nature. We believe also that there is no profound religious feeling that does not rest on the realistic confession that nature is invincible.

Article 8

It is admitted even by the apologists of Industrial Progress that certain economic evils follow in the wake of the machines. These are such as over-production, unemployment, poverty, and the unequal distribution of wealth. But the remedies proposed by the apologists are always homeopathic. They expect the evils to disappear when they have bigger and better machines--and a good many more of them. The remedial programs therefore look forward to further industrialism, whether developing spontaneously or under the direction of super-engineers; and to such accessory economic technique as is involved in the schemes of benevolent capital, or embattled labor, or peaceful co-operation and socialism. We have nothing here to do with these evils, which may or may not be remediable; nor with the remedies proposed. We are neither plutocratic nor proletarian in our sympathies.

Article 9

The evil with which we are concerned does not lie in this physical distress, but in the spiritual poverty that marks the age of machines. The apologists of industrialism sometimes admit this evil too, but only in a certain measure, and on the assumption that it is not inevitable. They would remedy the poverty of the contemporary spirit through an educational institution, which would instruct the contemporary spirit in the historic arts and humanities. We believe that salvation is not to be encountered on that road. The trouble with our life-pattern is to be located at its economic base, and we cannot rebuild it by pouring in soft materials from the top. The young men and women in colleges, if they are placed in a false way of life, cannot make more than an inconsequential acquaintance with the arts and humanities transmitted to them from the happier periods. Or else the understanding of those arts and humanities will make them the more wretched in their own destitution. Industrial technique is the things [sic] that can be admirably communicated to the students of the colleges. The effort to communicate the so-called "cultures" is mostly a vanity. It is really an effort to substitute the enjoyment of the arts for the enjoyment of nature, when under the circumstances the meaning of the arts cannot be understood.

Article 10

The remedy which we suggest for the spiritual malady of the age is simple but radical: the cancellation of the ideal of Industrial Progress, which is its cause. We propose this as a program which individuals should accept, and to which they should then labor to convert their communities. The fortunate, or industrially backward communities, such as those in the South, must be careful never to catch up. Any industrial schemes which they may undertake should be sharply limited from the start.

On the other hand, the advanced industrial communities had better as soon as possible repudiate the idea of further aimless progress, and consent to some one or other economic establishment as permanent. While they are about it, they may well consent also to a considerable scrapping of the industrial machinery now extant.

Article 11

It is sometimes assumed that spiritual poverty affects only those who are engaged in actual industrial production--that is, only "labor" and "business" men, and these only in their working hours. We agree that it takes good hold there. The tending of machines, or the practice of a specialized industrial technique, is not a satisfactory experience. It is not comparable with old-fashioned agriculture, for instance. And on the whole, the industrial occupations cannot be pursued either with much intelligence or with much enjoyment.

Article 12

But we believe that spiritual poverty affects also the consumers of the industrial products, and in this way the whole American public. It is one of the consequences of Industrial Progress that production greatly outruns the rate of natural consumption. To overcome this embarrassment, the producers must wheedle or coerce the public into being loyal and steady consumers, in order to keep the machine running. But the products to be consumed are bound to become increasingly superfluous and fantastical. The loyal consumers therefore commit themselves to slavery on two counts:-- First, they must labor the harder in order to secure means for purchasing the products; and second, they must devote their free periods to using the products, which means the substitution of artificial and mechanical diversions for their natural enjoyments.

Article 13

Industrial Progress affects society as well as private life. The social institutions in an industrial age are expanded into larger and looser units. The quantitative production of commodities requires the creation of wider markets to consume them, and the means of creating the markets are the new facilities of transportation and communication. Under these conditions the local communities lose their identities and merge into communication-areas that are scarcely in the original sense communities at all. An extensive development has been secured at the expense of an intensive development.

Article 14

Practically, our program at the present time is not very pretentious. For the most part, we would disseminate a doctrine. We would stiffen the resistance of anti-industrialists, and cause those who had capitulated too quickly to reconsider their position. If we could ever meet with the good fortune to be denominated a menace to Industrial Progress, it would probably be because we had moved people to scorn that ideal, and to refuse to consume the superfluous industrial output uncritically,--in such numbers as to constitute a spontaneous boycott. We

would gladly see the edifices of industrialism collapse quite unofficially, just because the oppressive weight would no longer be endured; but with as little harm as might be to those who now stand under it.

Article 15

But wherever there may be a practical issue calling for political action, and presenting a clear-cut distinction between the industrial life and the good life, we would covet the opportunity of taking our part.

Article 16

The immediate political issue which seems to us paramount in this country is that which is developing on national lines between the industrial and agrarian interests. On this issue we are wholly with the latter. Among the monstrous effects of industrialism in America is this one: the fraction of the total population which could once be supported on our soil has been greatly reduced. It is little enough to ask that the present farming population be empowered by appropriate legislation to earn a competent living. We would also like to see the farming population once more increased at the expense of the industrial districts, though not necessarily with the hope that all the evicted farmers, or their numerical equivalent, might be restored to their former tenure.

Article 17

In seeking an effective political expression for our agrarian principles, we are obliged to record our opposition to the Republican Party, as one that seems too far committed to Industrial Progress. With little less conviction, we announce also our leaning towards the Democratic Party. For it is the opposition party; and furthermore it is historically identified with the defence of the Southern way of life, with an instinctive suspicion of big business, with a bias in favor of localism in government, and with a conviction about the right of the individual to his pursuit of happiness. But here again we prefer the cause to the name. The cause is not anti-Republicanism, nor Democracy, but agrarianism. It must be supported with all possible unanimity by the agrarian interests. If it cannot control a given party organization, it had better effect a new one. If the agrarian South cannot use the Democratic Party as an effective instrument in a national agrarian campaign, then the agrarian South should do a strange thing: it should abandon the Democratic Party to its fate.

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A Statement of Principles¹

The authors contributing to this book are Southerners, well acquainted with one another and of similar tastes, though not necessarily living in the same physical community, and perhaps only at this moment aware of themselves as a single group of men. By conversation and exchange of letters over a number of years it had developed that they

¹I'll Take My Stand, "Introduction" (New York, 1930), pp. ix-xx.

entertained many convictions in common, and it was decided to make a volume in which each one should furnish his views upon a chosen topic. This was the general background. But background and consultation as to the various topics were enough; there was to be no further collaboration. And so no single author is responsible for any view outside his own article. It was through the good fortune of some deeper agreement that the book was expected to achieve its unity. All the articles bear in the same sense upon the book's title-subject: all tend to support a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way; and all as much as agree that the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase, Agrarian versus Industrial.

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But after the book was under way it seemed a pity if the contributors, limited as they were within their special subjects, should stop short of showing how close their agreements really were. On the contrary, it seemed that they ought to go on and make themselves known as a group already consolidated by a set of principles which could be stated with a good deal of particularity. This might prove useful for the sake of future reference, if they should undertake any further joint publication. It was then decided to prepare a general introduction for the book which would state briefly the common convictions of the group. This is the statement. To it every one of the contributors in this book has subscribed.

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Nobody now proposes for the South, or for any other community in this country, an independent political destiny. That idea is thought to have been finished in 1865. But how far shall the South surrender its moral, social, and economic autonomy to the victorious principle of Union? That question remains open. The South is a minority section that has hitherto been jealous of its minority right to live its own kind of life. The South scarcely hopes to determine the other sections, but it does propose to determine itself, within the utmost limits of legal action. Of late, however, there is the melancholy fact that the South itself has wavered a little and shown signs of wanting to join up behind the common or American industrial ideal. It is against that tendency that this book is written. The younger Southerners, who are being converted frequently to the industrial gospel, must come back to the support of the Southern tradition. They must be persuaded to look very critically at the advantages of becoming a "new South" which will be only an undisguished replica of the usual industrial community.

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But there are many other minority communities opposed to industrialism, and wanting a much simpler economy to live by. The communities and private persons sharing the agrarian tastes are to be found widely within the Union. Proper living is a matter of the intelligence and the will, does not depend on the local climate or geography, and is capable of a definition which is general and not Southern at all.

Southerners have a filial duty to discharge to their own section. But their cause is precarious and they must seek alliances with sympathetic communities everywhere. The members of the present group would be happy to be counted as members of a national agrarian movement.

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Industrialism is the economic organization of the collective American society. It means the decision of society to invest its economic resources in the applied sciences. But the word science has acquired a certain sanctitude. It is out of order to quarrel with science in the abstract, or even with the applied sciences when their applications are made subject to criticism and intelligence. The capitalization of the applied sciences has now become extravagant and uncritical; it has enslaved our human energies to a degree now clearly felt to be burdensome. The apologists of industrialism do not like to meet this charge directly; so they often take refuge in saying that they are devoted simply to science! They are really devoted to the applied sciences and to practical production. Therefore it is necessary to employ a certain skepticism even at the expense of the Cult of Science, and to say, It is an Americanism, which looks innocent and disinterested, but really is not either.

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The contribution that science can make to a labor is to render it easier by the help of a tool or a process, and to assure the laborer of his perfect economic security while he is engaged upon it. Then it can be performed with leisure and enjoyment. But the modern laborer has not exactly received this benefit under the industrial regime. His labor is hard, its tempo is fierce, and his employment is insecure. The first principle of a good labor is that it must be effective, but the second principle is that it must be enjoyed. Labor is one of the largest items in the human career; it is a modest demand to ask that it may partake of happiness.

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The regular act of applied science is to introduce into labor a labor-saving device or a machine. Whether this is a benefit depends on how far it is advisable to save the labor. The philosophy of applied science is generally quite sure that the saving of labor is a pure gain, and that the more of it the better. This is to assume that labor is an evil, that only the end of labor or the material product is good. On this assumption labor becomes mercenary and servile, and it is no wonder if many forms of modern labor are accepted without resentment though they are evidently brutalizing. The act of labor as one of the happy functions of human life has been in effect abandoned, and is practiced solely for its rewards.

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Even the apologists of industrialism have been obliged to admit that some economic evils follow in the wake of the machines. These are such as overproduction, unemployment, and a growing inequality in the distribution of wealth. But the remedies proposed by the apologists are

always homeopathic. They expect the evils to disappear when we have bigger and better machines, and more of them. Their remedial programs, therefore, look forward to more industrialism. Sometimes they see the system righting itself spontaneously and without direction: they are Optimists. Sometimes they rely on the benevolence of capital, or the militancy of labor, to bring about a fairer division of the spoils: they are Cooperationists or Socialists. And sometimes they expect to find super-engineers, in the shape of Boards of Control, who will adapt production to consumption and regulate prices and guarantee business against fluctuations: they are Sovietists. With respect to these last it must be insisted that the true Sovietists or Communists--if the term may be used here in the European sense--are the Industrialists themselves. They would have the government set up an economic super-organization, which in turn would become the government. We therefore look upon the Communist menace as a menace indeed, but not as a Red one; because it is simply according to the blind drift of our industrial development to expect in America at last much the same economic system as that imposed by violence upon Russia in 1917.

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Turning to consumption, as the grand end which justifies the evil of modern labor, we find that we have been deceived. We have more time in which to consume, and many more products to be consumed. But the tempo of our labors communicates itself to our satisfactions, and these also become brutal and hurried. The constitution of the natural man probably does not permit him to shorten his labor-time and enlarge his consuming-time indefinitely. He has to pay the penalty in satiety and aimlessness. The modern man has lost his sense of vocation.

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Religion can hardly expect to flourish in an industrial society. Religion is our submission to the general intention of a nature that is fairly inscrutable; it is the sense of our rôle as creatures within it. But nature industrialized, transformed into cities and artificial habitations, manufactured into commodities, is no longer nature but a highly simplified picture of nature. We receive the illusion of having power over nature, and lose the sense of nature as something mysterious and contingent. The God of nature under these conditions is merely an amiable expression, a superfluity, and the philosophical understanding ordinarily carried in the religious experience is not there for us to have.

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Nor do the arts have a proper life under industrialism, with the general decay of sensibility which attends it. Art depends, in general, like religion, on a right attitude to nature; and in particular on a free and disinterested observation of nature that occurs only in leisure. Neither the creation nor the understanding of works of art is possible in an industrial age except by some local and unlikely suspension of the industrial drive.

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The amenities of life also suffer under the curse of a strictly-business or industrial civilization. They consist in such practices as manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life, romantic love --in the social exchanges which reveal and develop sensibility in human affairs. If religion and the arts are founded on right relations of man-to-nature, these are founded on right relations of man-to-man.

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Apologists of industrialism are even inclined to admit that its actual processes may have upon its victims the spiritual effects just described. But they think that all can be made right by extraordinary educational efforts, by all sorts of cultural institutions and endowments. They would cure the poverty of the contemporary spirit by hiring experts to instruct it in spite of itself in the historic culture. But salvation is hardly to be encountered on that road. The trouble with the life-pattern is to be located at its economic base, and we cannot rebuild it by pouring in soft materials from the top. The young men and women in colleges, for example, if they are already placed in a false way of life, cannot make more than an inconsequential acquaintance with the arts and humanities transmitted to them. Or else the understanding of these arts and humanities will but make them the more wretched in their own destitution.

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The "Humanists" are too abstract. Humanism, properly speaking, is not an abstract system, but a culture, the whole way in which we live, act, think, and feel. It is a kind of imaginatively balanced life lived out in a definite social tradition. And, in the concrete, we believe that this, the genuine humanism, was rooted in the agrarian life of the older South and of other parts of the country that shared in such a tradition. It was not an abstract moral "check" derived from the classics--it was not soft material poured in from the top. It was deeply founded in the way of life itself--in its tables, chairs, portraits, festivals, laws, marriage customs. We cannot recover our native humanism by adopting some standard of taste that is critical enough to question the contemporary arts but not critical enough to question the social and economic life which is their ground.

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The tempo of the industrial life is fast, but that is not the worst of it; it is accelerating. The ideal is not merely some set form of industrialism, with so many stable industries, but industrial progress, or an incessant extension of industrialization. It never proposes a specific goal; it initiates the infinite series. We have not merely capitalized certain industries; we have capitalized the laboratories and inventors, and undertaken to employ all the labor-saving devices that come out of them. But a fresh labor-saving device introduced into an industry does not emancipate the laborers in that industry so much as it evicts them. Applied at the expense of agriculture, for example, the new processes have reduced the part of the population supporting itself upon the soil to a smaller and smaller fraction. Of course no single labor-saving process is fatal; it brings on a period of unemployed labor and unemployed capital, but soon a new industry is devised which will put them

both to work again, and a new commodity is thrown upon the market. The laborers were sufficiently embarrassed in the meantime, but, according to the theory, they will eventually be taken care of. It is now the public which is embarrassed; it feels obligated to purchase a commodity for which it had expressed no desire, but it is invited to make its budget equal to the strain. All might yet be well, and stability and comfort might again obtain, but for this: partly because of industrial ambitions and partly because the repressed creative impulse must break out somewhere, there will be a stream of further labor-saving devices in all industries, and the cycle will have to be repeated over and over. The result is an increasing disadjustment and instability.

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It is an inevitable consequence of industrial progress that production greatly outruns the rate of natural consumption. To overcome the disparity, the producers, disguised as the pure idealists of progress, must coerce and wheedle the public into being loyal and steady consumers, in order to keep the machines running. So the rise of modern advertising --along with its twin, personal salesmanship--is the most significant development of our industrialism. Advertising means to persuade the consumers to want exactly what the applied sciences are able to furnish them. It consults the happiness of the consumer no more than it consulted the happiness of the laborer. It is the great effort of a false economy of life to approve itself. But its task grows more difficult every day.

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It is strange, of course, that a majority of men anywhere could ever as with one mind become enamored of industrialism: a system that has so little regard for individual wants. There is evidently a kind of thinking that rejoices in setting up a social objective which has no relation to the individual. Men are prepared to sacrifice their private dignity and happiness to an abstract social ideal, and without asking whether the social ideal produces the welfare of any individual man whatsoever. But this is absurd. The responsibility of men is for their own welfare and that of their neighbors; not for the hypothetical welfare of some fabulous creature called society.

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Opposed to the industrial society is the agrarian, which does not stand in particular need of definition. An agrarian society is hardly one that has no use at all for industries, for professional vocations, for scholars and artists, and for the life of cities. Technically, perhaps, an agrarian society is one in which agriculture is the leading vocation, whether for wealth, for pleasure, or for prestige--a form of labor that is pursued with intelligence and leisure, and that becomes the model to which the other forms approach as well as they may. But an agrarian regime will be secured readily enough where the superfluous industries are not allowed to rise against it. The theory of agrarianism is that the culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations, and that therefore it should have the economic preference and enlist the maximum number of workers.

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These principles do not intend to be very specific in proposing any practical measures. How may the little agrarian community resist the Chamber of Commerce of its county seat, which is always trying to import some foreign industry that cannot be assimilated to the life-pattern of the community? Just what must the Southern leaders do to defend the traditional Southern life? How may the Southern and the Western agrarians unite for effective action? Should the agrarian forces try to capture the Democratic party, which historically is so closely affiliated with the defense of individualism, the small community, the state, the South? Or must the agrarians--even the Southern ones--abandon the Democratic party to its fate and try a new one? What legislation could most profitably be championed by the powerful agrarians in the Senate of the United States? What anti-industrial measures might promise to stop the advances of industrialism, or even undo some of them, with the least harm to those concerned? What policy should be pursued by the educators who have a tradition at heart? These and many other questions are of the greatest importance, but they cannot be answered here.

For, in conclusion, this much is clear: If a community, or a section, or a race, or an age, is groaning under industrialism, and well aware that it is an evil dispensation, it must find the way to throw it off. To think that this cannot be done is pusillanimous. And if the whole community, section, race, or age thinks it cannot be done, then it has simply lost its political genius and doomed itself to impotence.

APPENDIX B

Biographical Sketches

DONALD GRADY DAVIDSON (1893-)

Described by one of his Vanderbilt colleagues, H. C. Nixon, as the most faithful, consistently conservative, and unchanging member of the Agrarian group, Donald Davidson for nearly four decades has substantiated this characterization in his writing and through his variety of activities. "Still Rebels, Still Yankees," the title of an essay Davidson first published in 1933 and the title he chose for a recent collection, suggests not only the unchanging firmness of his stand but something of the spirit it reflects. For his poetry and his discussions of folk literature, aesthetics, Southern beliefs, customs, and historical personages, social problems and sociological studies, political theory and practice have been directed in part toward the end of preserving a "traditional" Southern agrarian culture while attacking an "anti-traditional" Northern industrial society, and in part toward affirming the values of art. Early in his career, writing to Allen Tate about the possibilities of a new turn in Fugitive activity, Davidson had pictured himself in terms that seem not inappropriate today: "In my old role of impassioned Idealist, I still believe anything is possible for determined men."¹ Davidson's activities have revealed him as an "impassioned Idealist" and a determined man, although he may no longer believe that "anything is possible."

His consistency is revealed also by his environments: for more than forty years Vanderbilt University has been his academic habitat and since 1931 he has spent most of his summers in a quiet, New England rural environment, teaching at the Breadloaf School of English of Middlebury College, Vermont.²

He was born in Campbellsville, Tennessee, on August 18, 1893, the eldest of five children. Most of his boyhood was spent in a small town, Lynnville, sixty-five miles south of Nashville. "The pattern of my boyhood memories," Davidson recalls, "is built around rural towns of Middle Tennessee where [my father] taught in public schools."³ His childhood environment developed in him a delight in reading and study and a pleasure in music. His father, teacher for forty years, principal of Lynnville Academy and superintendent of Lincoln County, inspired in his son a love of the classics. In his home a collection of books was available, supplemented by whatever could be borrowed; and as a boy, Davidson read Plutarch's Lives, Shakespeare, Ramsey's Annals of Tennessee, and the ninth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. "Long before coming to Vanderbilt," he recalls,

¹Letter, March 15, 1924 [25?--A.T.].

²Except for these summers, one in New York state, and visits to Ohio, his wife's home state, Davidson has lived in the South.

³Kunitz and Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, p. 350.

"I had read all of Cooper, Scott, Poe, and other worthies that I could lay hands on, . . ."¹ His mother, a music teacher, gave him his first lessons on the piano and fostered in him a love of music. For a time he considered going to Harvard to major in music, but abandoned the idea in favor of belles lettres.²

As a youth Davidson attended Branham and Hughes School at Spring Hill (1905-1909), a preparatory institution for boys. There he took the "old" classical course--four years of Latin, three years of Greek, and four of mathematics and English. Caesar, Homer, Euclid, history and English (among other fields) were studied from eight until three, a training rigorous enough to make his later study at Vanderbilt seem easy by comparison, he recalls.³

His higher formal education was also acquired in his native state. Following one of his kinfolk, he entered Vanderbilt University in 1910 "on a \$100 loan and a little odd cash. . . . I barely held out through the freshman year," he relates.⁴ Withdrawing to teach school in rural Tennessee for four years, Davidson returned at a fortunate moment: in 1914 John Crowe Ransom had just joined the English department faculty at Vanderbilt University and was teaching Shakespeare among other courses. Davidson found himself in an exciting intellectual atmosphere--classes with Ransom, Dr. Edwin Mims, chairman of the English department, Walter Clyde Curry, eminent Chaucer scholar, and Dr. Herbert Sanborn, professor of philosophy;⁵ extra-curricular activities including informal musical evenings, visits to the theater, endless discussions with his professors, with a Nashville mystic and amateur etymologist, Sidney Mtttron Hirsch, and with classmates among whom were some of the future Fugitives.⁶ From his classes with Ransom,

¹"The Thankless Muse and Her Fugitive Poets," The Sewanee Review, LXVI (Spring, 1958), 209.

²Davidson's interest in music has continued; in addition to the piano, he plays the mandolin and guitar with which he accompanies himself when he sings folk ballads, a literature to which he has devoted considerable study. Along with instructing high school students in Latin and Greek in his first teaching position, he composed an operetta, "Pandora," which was produced by a number of Tennessee high schools, and six years ago he wrote the libretto for a folk opera, Singin' Billy (see pp. 480-1 below).

³"The New South and the Conservative Tradition," Lecture at Bowdoin College, April 16, 1958 [unpublished MS.], p. 16; and Louise Cowan, The Fugitive Group, p. 11.

⁴"The Thankless Muse and Her Fugitive Poets," p. 208.

⁵Davidson's recollection of Dr. Sanborn and his classes is vivid: ". . . Dr. Sanborn strode vigorously to his desk, cloaked in all the Olympian majesty of Leipzig and Heidelberg, and, without a book or note before him, delivered a perfectly ordered lecture, freely sprinkled with quotations from the original Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, German, French, or Italian, which of course he would not insult us by translating" (*ibid.*, p. 211).

⁶Davidson mentions in particular Alec B. Stevenson, William Yandell Elliott and Stanley Johnson.

Mims, and Curry, Davidson dates the real beginning of his systematic devotion to literature.¹ "It was," he remembers, "the intellectual association that counted most and the extracurricular part counted as heavily as the curricular, if not more so."²

In 1917 Davidson received his Bachelor of Arts degree, shortly after entering the United States Army. He was commissioned a second lieutenant at Fort Oglethorpe,³ helped to organize Company E, 324th Infantry of the 81st Division, and fought in the Vosges sector in the closing phase of the Meuse-Argonne offensive. In 1918 he married Theresa Sherrer.⁴ They have one daughter, Mary Theresa (Mrs. Eric Bell).

Davidson resumed his academic career after the war by accepting the chairmanship of the English department at a small Methodist college, Kentucky Wesleyan. The following year (1920) he was appointed instructor of English at Vanderbilt; there he completed his Master of Arts degree in 1922; in 1938 he was promoted to Professor of English. Among the many courses he has taught at Vanderbilt and the Breadloaf School of English are English Poetry of the Nineteenth Century (particularly of the 1890's), American Folk Ballads, the English Lyric, Creative Writing, Hardy and Conrad.

Davidson has been recognized for his achievements as poet, critic, and teacher. In 1923 his poem "Avalon" was singled out for "honors" by the Poetry Society of South Carolina, and "Fire on Belmont Street," the epilogue of The Tall Men, won the Society's Southern Prize in 1926. He was awarded two Doctors of Letters, one in 1946 by Cumberland University, the second in 1948 by Washington and Lee. Recently he was selected to inaugurate the Mercer University Eugenia Dorothy Blount Lamar Memorial Lecture Series, established "to provide lectures of the very highest type of scholarship which will aid in the permanent preservation of the values of Southern culture, history and literature." Given in November, 1957, Davidson's three papers--"The Thankless Muse and Her Fugitive Poets," "The Southern Writer and the Modern University," and "Counter-Attack, 1930-40: The South Against Leviathan"--were published by the Georgia University Press in 1958, under the title, Southern Writers in the Modern World.

Davidson's career as a writer can be traced back to his Fugitive days. Already by the fall of 1921, he was meeting regularly with some of

¹Twentieth Century Authors, p. 350.

²"The Thankless Muse and Her Fugitive Poets," p. 209.

³He and Ransom used to discuss Ransom's poetry while they were candidates for commissions at the Officers' Training Camp. (See Cowan, p.24.)

⁴Mrs. Davidson studied law at Ohio State and Vanderbilt Universities, receiving her LL.D. from Vanderbilt. In addition to serving as a law librarian, she has been a research associate in Brazilian law and one of the attorneys at the Clinton trial for the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government. She is a specialist in Roman and Anglo-American law. Mrs. Davidson is an artist and has illustrated her husband's two-volume work, The Tennessee, and has designed a wood engraving for the frontispiece of Still Rebels, Still Yankees.

his former classmates and with Hirsch, Ransom, and Tate at Vanderbilt in a kind of "cousinship of poetry." The poems which they brought for relentless critical discussions resulted in a decision to publish the little magazine, The Fugitive. About a year after the appearance of the first issue in April, 1922, Davidson succeeded to the editorship. Of his association with the magazine he wrote Tate in 1924: "So long as the high spirit was uniform, so long as the enterprise possessed nobility, it was a truly happy labor."¹

Like the experience of some of his fellow Fugitive-Agrarians, Davidson's as editor of The Fugitive was helpful when he undertook other editorial duties. For more than six years (from 1924 to 1930), he edited a syndicated book page for the Nashville Tennessean.² During these years he wrote a weekly column, first called "The Spy Glass," later "The Critic's Almanac,"³ in which he commented on the literary scene, particularly on matters of local interest. Although this page grew to "ambitious critical proportions," said Davidson,⁴ and demanded much of the editor, it was also an outlet for the expression of his convictions about the permanent values inherent in literature and in an agrarian, tradition-oriented Southern culture. It meant much more to Davidson than an opportunity to supplement his income from teaching (he started with a salary of ten dollars a week): On March 21, 1928, he wrote to Allen Tate about plans to syndicate the page and expressed his hope for its development and influence: "I should try to give it within limits, the character of being the most substantial and distinctive thing of its kind in the South and in the United States if possible, and should hope to do so in part by attracting the right sort of reviewers."

To realize these aims he secured as reviewers university faculty members, friends and colleagues who later joined in the Agrarian movement.⁵

¹Letter, April 25, 1924.

²When the page appeared in the Tennessee papers (in Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville), it reached an estimated half million readers in Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, and parts of Alabama. It was discontinued in 1930 when the depression forced the Tennessean to curtail expenses.

³When Davidson made the title change he also described the nature and purpose of the column: ". . . Almanacs are miscellaneous; they discuss other things besides the weather. They are domestic. They are homely things. . . . This particular almanac, composed from week to week, does not claim to reflect the oracles of the gods. It may be as untrustworthy as most almanacs. But it will serve as a catch-all; for memoranda, critical accounts, pictures of contemporaries, literary philters and curiosities may be slipped in here, to be read and passed by, but at least printed with some regularity" (Nashville Tennessean, April 27, 1928).

⁴Twentieth Century Authors, p. 350.

⁵Among the reviewers were Ransom, Nixon, Owsley, Kline, Tate, Lanier, Wade, and Warren. Other Fugitives who appeared on the page were Walter Clyde Curry, Alec B. Stevenson, and Jesse Wills. Professor Grant C. Knight of the University of Kentucky also reviewed for Davidson.

The book reviews were thoughtful and incisive. In addition to children's books, novels, and Southern histories and biographies, the page featured reviews of political analysis, literary criticism, poetry, economics, philosophy, and natural history. Included, for instance, were commentaries on H. G. Wells' The Open Conspiracy, George Bernard Shaw's The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Frost's West-Running Brook, John Dewey's Experience and Nature, Ralph Borsodi's This Ugly Civilization, and Lucius Beebe's Beneath Tropic Seas.¹

But Davidson's activities were more extensive and varied. Early in his career at Vanderbilt, he enlisted in the cause of the "Thankless Muse." In addition to his work on The Fugitive, to which he contributed a number of poems, he published his first volume of poetry, An Outland Piper (1924).² One major theme of this volume, it might be said, was the poet's opposition to a world of ugliness and materialism. Beauty, Love, Youth, Desire--all elements of the poetic spirit--were celebrated in images of the Tiger and Queen of the Faeries. Three years later one of his most ambitious poems furnished the title for his second book of poetry, The Tall Men (1927). Honoring his Tennessee heritage and the pioneering "tall" men--the kind of men who no longer appear in a dehumanized world of war, mechanization, and urbanization--Davidson at the end of the poem admonishes the soft citizens who may be consumed by the fire of civilization:

Rush out into the night; take nothing with you;
Only your naked selves, your naked hearts.
Fly from the wrath of fire to the hills
Where water is the slow peace of time.

The seed of the white man grows on Indian graves,
Waxing in steel and stone, nursing the fire
That eats and blackens till he has no life
But in the fire that eats him. . . .

. . . Remember the rifles
Talking men's talk into the Tennessee darkness
And the long-haired hunters watching the Tennessee hills,
In the land of big rivers for something.³

The thematic burden of Lee in the Mountains and Other Poems (1938), his last published collection of poetry,⁴ is the preservation of a regional and

¹Except for the analysis of Dewey's work, all of these reviews were written by Davidson.

²Of the thirty-three poems appearing in An Outland Piper, twenty-four had first been published in The Fugitive.

³"Fire on Belmont Street," The Tall Men (Boston, 1927), pp. 116-17.

⁴This collection contains a revised version of The Tall Men and was reissued by Scribner's in 1949. A new volume of poems is scheduled for publication in 1961.

ancestral tradition. The title poem reveals not a Lee of the battlefield but a defeated general, president of a poor Virginia college, the great outlaw Lee who speaks in chapel (to the sons of his beloved region) words of advice which one critic described as "the essence of the older concept of Americanism."¹

Young men, the God of your fathers is a just
And merciful God Who in this blood once shed
On your green altars measures out all days,
And measures out the grace
Whereby alone we live;
And in His might He waits,
Brooding within the certitude of time,
To bring this lost forsaken valor
And the fierce faith undying
And the love quenchless
To flower among the hills to which we cleave,
To fruit upon the mountains whither we flee,
Never forsaking, never denying
His children and his children's children forever
Unto all generations of the faithful heart.²

Davidson's poetry is marked by a striking lyrical quality. Less obviously experimental in metrics, less derivative from the metaphysical poets than the work of some of his contemporaries, his is a poetry which recognizes the values of eloquence and simplicity. Using a plain idiomatic language of the folk and a rhetorical eloquence which evokes with visual clarity images of his native region, Davidson has also represented universal emotions in individual experiences. "In brief," said Professor Richmond C. Beatty, "[his poetry] represents a kind of writing that is 'provincial' in subject and character. But one should immediately add that in its overtones it is universal. . . ."³ The poet's function is not solely to sing with the lyric voice. As Davidson expressed it at the Fugitives' Reunion:

It was necessary for the poets . . . to make an attack on society. And, of course, we have done that, you see. Every defense of poetry that has been made, no matter what the form--whether in one of John's [Ransom] most aesthetic essays, or in some of the Agrarian essays in a more direct form--there is always the intuitive approach to the evils of the society."⁴

In Davidson's poetry, too, the attack on modern society is apparent, although sometimes indirect.⁵

¹Richmond C. Beatty, "Donald Davidson as Fugitive-Agrarian," Southern Renaissance, p. 410.

²Lee in the Mountains and Other Poems, p. 7.

³"Donald Davidson as Fugitive-Agrarian," p. 411.

⁴Fugitives' Reunion, p. 28.

⁵His ironic scorn for modern commercial culture is apparent in sections of The Tall Men. See pp. 68-72 above.

The style of Davidson's prose works similarly reveals not only a graceful lucidity and persuasiveness characteristic of a master of prose but also a "devoted defense of tradition" which he conceives as "the true American position." The Attack on Leviathan (1938), his first collection of essays, reflects the central issues raised by the Agrarians through the 1930's. Here Davidson describes the alarming effects of the Leviathan state and of industrial financial interests, and defends a sectional agrarian culture. It is a book concerned with the conflict between national and sectional aims, and Davidson discusses it from various points of view--history, politics, geography, literature, economics, sociology, and ethics. His second prose work, The Tennessee, a two-volume study published in 1946 and 1948, is one of the Rivers of America series. In 1957 his second major collection of essays appeared: Still Rebels, Still Yankees represents almost a quarter of a century of thought on tradition and experiment in modern poetry; tradition versus anti-tradition in prose fiction; the oral tradition--ballad, folksong, and myth; the South in literature and history; and regionalism and nationalism. "The essays and articles chosen for this book," wrote Davidson, are mostly concerned with the impact of the modern regime upon the vital continuum of human experience to which we apply the inadequate term 'traditional'; and no less with the response of tradition to that impact, in the arts and in society."¹

Reflecting his interest in the folk arts, particularly in the ballad and folksong, are the essays which form the central section of Still Rebels, Still Yankees. They furnish one more evidence of his basic conviction that the healthy society is the agrarian, for only in traditional culture, he believes, can an authentic rather than a popularized folk tradition flourish. Davidson finds that,

. . . the true cherishers of the folk tradition are, first, the family in its traditional role, securely established on the land, in occupations not hostile to song and dance and tale; and second, the stable community which is really a community and not a mere real estate development. If we cannot cherish these, we cannot hope to cherish folk song, and probably we cannot long cherish the high forms of art that feed upon folk tradition. We may even prove ourselves ignorant of what life really is."²

Davidson's interest in ballads and his view of their function in a society of specialization are revealed in his charming, romantic libretto for Singin' Billy (1952), an opera by the late Charles Faulkner Bryan. A representation of the folk tradition of white spirituals and shape note singing, Singin' Billy utilized four spirituals from William Walker's collection, The Southern Harmony (1835). The leading character, Singin' Billy Walker, is treated somewhat in the manner of a myth--i.e., a kind of "folk-interpretation of facts, or addition to facts."³ Davidson is concerned that

¹Still Rebels, Still Yankees, p. vii.

²"Current Attitudes Toward Folklore," ibid., p. 136.

³"The Origins of Our Heroes," ibid., p. 154. In commenting on how folk heroes are created, Davidson has pointed out that mythologizing is an essential part of the process; this, in essence, is the way William Walker

folk tradition not only be preserved but transmitted to those who would make it a part of their existence. "Our concern," he wrote in 1941, "should somehow be directed toward the young folks rather than, as now, exclusively toward the old folks from whom we collect such interesting examples of folk song and folk tale."¹ Successful performances of Singin' Billy have been given at several Southern colleges; following its premiere at Vanderbilt Theatre in 1952 before audiences estimated at six thousand, it was performed at Florida State University, Texas State College, and East Central Junior College in Mississippi.

The concept of organic unity is pervasive in Davidson's thinking, whether he is discussing a community, or its forms of aesthetic expression, or even something so individual and limited as learning how to write effective prose. To this concept he gives concrete expression in the preface to The Vermont Chap Book--Being a Garland of Ten Folk Ballads:

From the higher literary studies to simple things like singing a ballad or setting it in type is only a matter of stepping across the road. In a truly human world, it would always be thus: abstract and particular, book and life, never far apart, but close together, as meadow and printshop, ballad, college and scholarly specialties are close together while these lines are being set. The world of our day seems to want it otherwise but so much the worse for it. Too long have we indulged ourselves recklessly in division and specialization--in the kind of dissociation which, for doubtful practical pains, scatters the parts of our lives, often to great distance. And look at the result: commotions ruinous enough to shake the planet.

Today, what a distance there is between the poems of T. S. Eliot and the thing that passes for popular song. Too much refinement on one side and too low a vulgarization on the other--it is an unhealthy condition. This book, if it symbolizes a tendency, may suggest our instinctive recoil from such cultural gaps. Our arts may presently become less refined, our lives less scattered. Our interest in ballads, anticipatory of that healthy change, thus differs greatly from the Nineteenth Century interest, which was antiquarian and romantic, or else scientific.²

Davidson's academic writings (speaking literally of textbooks) also reflect his belief in organic unity. Two years after the publication of his anthology, British Poetry of the 1890's (1937), the first edition of his American Composition and Rhetoric appeared. A fourth edition was published in the fall of 1958. As Davidson described its aim and character:

The illustrative selections assembled . . . have been chosen with some thought for traditions, personalities, situations, events that are

was created as a character for the opera. For a discussion of American heroes, hero-worship, and mythologizing, see Davidson's review of Dixon Wecter's The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship, ibid., pp. 152-56.

¹"Current Attitudes Toward Folklore," ibid., p. 136.

²Vermont Chap Book, handset by Breadloaf Printers (Middlebury, Vermont, 1941), p. vi.

generally accepted as central, familiar, and meaningful in our American experience. . . . educational fashions, wars, the dominance of science, and various other causes have increasingly alienated our young people from this old, accepted body of thought [the Bible, the Greek and Roman classics, and certain standard British and Continental works]. . . . The young people may well begin with their own country, anyhow. If they can contemplate some characteristic bits of the American tradition in their familiar regional variety . . . , they may be the better prepared . . . to achieve acquaintance with the older body of thought . . . of which . . . the American tradition is an organic part.¹

In Twenty Lessons in Reading and Writing Davidson again spoke of organic unity as it relates to composition:

This book assumes, first, that a student may profit by confronting the verbal, grammatical, rhetorical, logical, scientific, artistic aspects of written composition in their all-together-ness--that is, in their natural union within the context of an acceptable--or preferably excellent--piece of prose. Momentarily, it is true, any one given aspect of prose must be abstracted for the sober purpose of paying close attention to it, recognizing it for what it is, and learning its applicability and use. But this kind of abstraction is slight and carries little risk. It is different from the kind of abstraction encountered in a rule book since the feature to be examined is seen in its living context; it is not a mere dry specimen with a label stuck on it, isolated from the tissue where it was meant to dwell and function.

The second assumption of this book is that the student who, with proper guidance, engages in such positive study of prose will be better prepared for writing than if he had not followed such a positive, organic method.²

Davidson is a man of strong and deeply rooted convictions, a writer who through ironic and explicit statement indicates his personal involvement in issues about which he is concerned; his is scarcely the objective, detached attitude. More than three decades ago, he wrote Allen Tate: "I have always heard a lot of talk about objectivity in writing, but I have never been able to conceive how in the world it can exist. . . . One must have an attitude toward his object, one must pity or scorn or accept; one cannot simply analyze."³ Nowhere is this view revealed more clearly than in Davidson's stand on the race issue, exemplified in the Negro problem. In 1927 he described the relationship between the black and white man in the image of a wall:

Black man, when you and I were young together,
We knew each other's hearts. Though I am no longer

¹To the Warders of the Gate [This pamphlet has been given the subtitle: "A Memorandum on the Teaching of Composition and Rhetoric--and of Almost Anything Else That May Happen Along, Including Philosophy, History, Logic, Spelling, Footnotes, Etiquette, the Literary Arts, Philology, Punctuation, the Dewey Decimal System, and the Einstein Formula"] (New York, n.d.), p. 8.

²"Preface " (New York, 1955), p. vi.

³Letter, July 8, 1922.

A child and you perhaps unfortunately
 Are no longer a child, we understand
 Better maybe than others. There is a wall
 Between us, anciently erected. Once
 It might have been crossed, men say. But now I cannot
 Forget that you were slave. We did not build
 The ancient wall, but there it painfully is.
 Let us not bruise our foreheads on the wall.¹

Since 1954, when the Supreme Court declared the "separate but equal" doctrine unconstitutional, Davidson has been actively engaged in opposing desegregation in Tennessee. As chairman of the Tennessee Federation for Constitutional Government, he has fought integration on the historic argument of states rights and the unconstitutionality of the Supreme Court decision.

The only sound course [he stated in 1955] is for the whole question to be determined by the Legislature, preferably by a Legislature elected on the basis of the issues now before us. Our educational officials do not derive their authority from the Supreme Court but from the people of the State, either by direct election or through appointment by their elected executives. Any hasty improvisation is therefore most improper and untimely. It is sure to be unsatisfactory. It will breed confusion and unrest.²

As chairman he subscribed to a formal statement issued by the Federation:

We . . . wish to join other citizens of the South and elsewhere in declaring our view that the decision of the Supreme Court in the segregation cases is a nullity, since the Court abandoned established precedent and juridical procedure in favor of mere sociological and psychological opinionating. The Justices violated the constitutional principle of the separation of powers by attempting to declare, not what the law is, but what they thought it ought to be. Thus they usurped the legislative powers accorded to the Federal Congress and the States of the Union.³

* * * * *

In 1922 Davidson assumed the pseudonym of Robin Gallivant for the poems he published in the first two issues of The Fugitive. Unconsciously but prophetically, he represented in "The Valley of the Dragon" something of his own career and mission:

Who will deliver me from the blight of the Dragon-Arm?
 He has digged a den in the valley and got a fearful brood,
 And only the sealed thatch has kept my love from harm,
 And only the carven-bench is safe as a holy rood.
 The valley is full of smoke, the Land is the Dragon's food!
 Who will deliver me? I wander seeking a Charm,--
 A Spell, a Sword, a Faith beyond the strange sea's foam
 To smite and slay the Dragon-brood and rest in my fair home.⁴

¹"The Tall Men," Section VI, The Tall Men, pp. 39-40.

²The Nashville Banner, June 21, 1955, p. 6.

³Idem.

⁴The Fugitive, I (June, 1922), 37.

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER (1886-1950)

For an artist who delighted in dualities, it is perhaps fitting that John Gould Fletcher be characterized--however inadequately--in a series of paradoxes. Most frequently labeled an Imagist, champion of the "new poetry" movement, and a literary friend of the energetic Amy Lowell and Ezra Pound (international Bohemian, "pioneer in the last great wave of expatriates"¹), Fletcher was also the poet to whom Allen Tate dedicated his most Southern poem, Ode to the Confederate Dead.² An expatriate for nearly a quarter of a century (just when it was most unwise to be an expatriate, Davidson observed), when he thought himself most enamoured of Europe and England, Fletcher was distinctively American, in fact even regional. Although he believed at one time that he had ceased to belong to the South, his work and life revealed that he had never completely escaped. "The subtle values of Europe were closed to him," it has been suggested, "because his heart was not with them and because his emotional strength lay elsewhere."³ The source of that strength--not only emotional but also critical and lyric--was, to a significant extent his Southern - Agrarian-American heritage.

This heritage was reanimated by visits to the United States. Three months of traveling through the South in 1915-16 (he had been living in Europe since 1909) stimulated him to write out of a heritage he thought he had repudiated. Had he known at that time, Fletcher was to write two decades later, that a Southern revival was coming, he might not have left the South then. But he did not, and his choice of exile had given him, he felt, "lessons of courage, of independence of thought and action, of the need for experiment in new and daring forms of imaginative expression."⁴ The "literary booty" resulting from this visit included "The Old South," an experiment in polyphonic prose; "Songs of Arkansas," and "Ghosts of an Old House," a poem Southern in atmosphere, imagistic in effect, and in the opinion of Fletcher himself, a work which "covered the old ground of a . . . vanished past, of unforgettable losses, of a tradition . . . long overlooked."⁵ It foreshadowed, for some critics, Fletcher's true metier since it suggests some of the themes and achievements of his most enduring poetry⁶--that which focused on America,

¹Fletcher, Life Is My Song, p. 60.

²Tate wrote Fletcher on November 4, 1930, "I am mighty glad that you are pleased with the dedication. It was only a small tribute--but the best at my command--to your distinguished work, to your distinguished devotion to principle, and not least, to the distinguished courage with which you have sustained your career."

³Horace Gregory and Marya Zaturenska, A History of American Poetry. 1900-1940 (New York, 1942), p. 203.

⁴Life Is My Song, p. 197.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Gregory and Zaturenska, p. 204. Harriet Monroe, too, wrote of Fletcher: "In spite of his cosmopolite wanderings and foreign residence, there is something indestructibly of his own country. . . . No one but a

particularly the Southwest, the land, the history, and the pioneering spirit; yet it was, at the same time, unmistakably personal.

Paradoxically, although Fletcher spoke reverently of an abstract "holiness of beauty," he achieved his most memorable lines when he was most direct, when his use of the concrete freed him from abstract theorizing and speculative aesthetics:

These are the lonely Ozarks. Fold on fold
The crumbling limestones, mossy drips, . . .
.
. . . It is a land
Of waste where nature sprawls, setting at naught
The ruined plans of man. A land unknown,
Blazing in summer with sumach blooms,
And glossy leaves of oaks, as rain drops slide
Into the shy stream, and beneath the boughs
Only darkness stirs: where year on year
The hawk hangs to the withered branch to tell
Whatever it is that moves amid cloud-shadowed
 hollows.¹

There is yet another paradox which helps to characterize Fletcher: anti-democratic in his tastes and convictions about the ideal society for the poet ("democracy" was equated with plutocracy), Fletcher nevertheless returned to his native section in 1933, settled again in Little Rock, and organized the Arkansas Folk Society in 1936 "in the hope of putting on a folk festival of mountaineer ballads and square dances, negro spirituals, and folk plays."² The difficulty of understanding Fletcher's personality, convictions, and life--an "uneasy, troubled" life--"a symbol of the American poet of our time"³--is suggested by an attempt to reconcile his interest in Arkansas, the folk, and the Southwest with his condemnation of democratic, uncultivated taste. In his autobiography Fletcher wrote:

. . . the reading and enjoyment of poetry can only be carried on by an intelligent and a leisured class. It was the intellectuals, the aristocrats of Athens--not the peasants and the fishermen--who appreciated Sophocles and Aeschylus. It was the wits, the scholars, and the courtiers of the Elizabethan age who--despite his truckling to the groundlings--valued and supported Shakespeare. . . . And if

Southerner brought up during the decay of the old regime could have written The Ghosts of an Old House, a poem perfumed with faded elegance and melancholy with vanished grandeur. . . . A certain type of much travelled, much educated, serious-minded American is manifest in all he writes." ("Comment: John Gould Fletcher," Poetry, XXVII [January, 1926], 209-210.)

¹"The Ozarks," The Burning Mountain (New York, 1946), pp. 37-38.

²Life Is My Song, p. 392.

³Norman Holmes Pearson, "The John Gould Fletcher Collection," The Yale University Library Gazette, XXX (January, 1956), 121.

any poet is to survive our day it will be because he too appeals finally to the well-bred, well-fed, leisured minority who have the time to read and the taste to enjoy his art. In such an age as this, when the democratic standard of taste admits as literature anything from mystery thrillers to the performance of highly publicized novelists, the poet has no place. . . .¹

Yet this same man could write in 1935 of his pleasure in a group of American regional painters (Thomas Hart Benton, John Stewart Curry, Grant Wood, and Charles Burchfield, among others) whose subjects were often twentieth-century "agrarian groundlings" and whose paintings show that "the American spirit can stand free from Europe." His harsh criticism of Stieglitz's work in the arts as "irresponsibility . . . , pretentious nonsense, . . . a spoof cosmopolitan substitute in the place of the honest reality of regional achievement"² suggests a contradiction of the creative experimentation of which he approved in literature and in which he participated when he lived abroad.

Some knowledge of the facts of Fletcher's life may offer a perspective for these paradoxes, if not an explanation or reconciliation. Like others of the Agrarian group who were descendents of Civil War veterans, Fletcher was an only son of a Confederate soldier. From his father he felt he had inherited certain pioneer characteristics--"a physical frame and constitution . . . adequate to the demands put upon it . . . ; a love of simple, honest, country folk, and for simple ways of living"³ . . . ; a certain streak of dour obstinacy that will not permit itself to be easily turned aside from any course once embarked upon; a love of travel and roving . . . ; and a frankness in speaking out my mind"; from his Danish-German mother, "all those aesthetic hankerings which have made me into a poet--all that love for pictures, architecture, music, . . . which has sustained me through life."⁴

John Gould Fletcher was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, January 3, 1886, and grew up in the historic Albert Pike mansion--appropriate to his father's position and his wealth,⁵ a "massive Doric columned mansion . . . from which a Negro coachman with a span of white horses drove him daily to and from his school."⁶ His early education, which included Latin and German, was begun with private tutors; after six years in school (three

¹Life Is My Song, p. 259.

²"The Stieglitz Spoof," American Review, V (March, 1935), 599.

³In 1941 he wrote a friend that he was looking forward to moving from the city to the remote Ozarks where he expected to live in a log cabin, without lights, plumbing, or telephone.

⁴Life Is My Song, p. 5.

⁵His father was one of the state's leading financiers--a bank president and a successful cotton broker. He had campaigned, unsuccessfully, for the Democratic nomination for Governor.

⁶Pearson, p. 121.

in a private academy and three in a public school), he left for Phillips Andover Academy to prepare for Harvard. At this time he was already aware of his dislike of American democratic ways: "I disliked democracy," he wrote in his autobiography, "preferred, on the whole, the past to the present. . . . In short, I was beginning to prepare for a later career as a poet."¹ At Harvard, to which he was sent by his mother, he was also unhappy: "I was a misfit," he declared. "The New England atmosphere was unfamiliar and I made few friends. I began to read widely and extensively [by his junior year he was a Nietzschean] and to scribble verses."²

When Fletcher was twenty, his father died. Then a senior at Harvard and financially independent, he decided to make writing poetry his career; he had considered archeology and had even traveled on an expedition from the Peabody Museum to Puye and Mesa Verde in the Southwest, but he had a miserable time; only writing appealed to him. Leaving Harvard just four months before he was to graduate--"he had already decided that the materialistic United States was no country for poets"³--Fletcher sailed for Italy in the summer of 1908. By the spring of 1909 he had settled in London where he was soon caught up in literary and political circles. There he became acquainted with A. R. Orage, editor of The New Age, who stimulated him to write poetry by directing him to Walt Whitman. Fletcher threw himself into the Socialist movement, turned to Fabian Socialism, and marched through the streets of London in a suffragette parade.⁴ There, too, he met the awesome, provocative Ezra Pound, who saw in Fletcher another disciple; agreed to promote his verse by reviewing it in Harriet Monroe's Poetry; and brought together Fletcher and Amy Lowell who was marshalling the forces for Imagism. It was through Pound and particularly through Miss Lowell's enthusiasm that his poetry became known in America; he had made a slight ripple in London literary waters with the simultaneous publication (at his own expense) of five books of poetry in 1913.⁵ At this stage of his career, he was identified fully with Imagism, although his "Color Symphonies"--which are his most frequently anthologized works--are more symbolistic than imagistic and represent his attempt to harmonize sound and color into a vast verbal orchestration. But Fletcher was not merely the recipient of others' favors. He, too, did much to promote the cause of the new poetry. By his enthusiastic comments and by lending to Pound books from his own excellent library of French symbolist poets, Fletcher felt that he was indirectly responsible for Pound's writing about them in a series of articles for the English public; from his own funds Fletcher also paid for literary contributions which came to Pound's The Egoist. His description to Amy Lowell, as well as her acquaintance with some of his experiments in

¹Life Is My Song, p. 13.

²Twentieth Century Authors, p. 466.

³Davidson, "In Memory of John Gould Fletcher," Still Rebels, Still Yankees, p. 36.

⁴Johnswood, p. 90.

⁵These were The Book of Nature, Fire and Wine, Fool's Gold, Visions of Evening, and The Dominant City.

poetic form--notably polyphonic prose and orchestral color words--was, Fletcher observed, flatteringly imitated by Miss Lowell in certain poems which she considered her finest.¹

Although the World War drove him back to the United States from 1914 to 1916, he returned to England to remain there (except for short trips to the United States) until 1933, an expatriation of twenty-four years. His re-entry to this country during the depression ended not only his self-imposed exile but also his first marriage to an English-woman, Daisy Arbuthnot.

Before repatriation to his native Arkansas, Fletcher showed both a wide range of interests and a constant groping for the meaning of life in art. His was a literary career dedicated to art, not merely in the abstractions of aesthetic theory but in such concrete embodiments as painting, sculpture, the graphic arts; in music; the cinema; and the dance, as well as in poetry.² In the early 1940's he wrote, "Apart from poetry, my chief interests are painting and music. Some day I would like to show parallel lines of development on which painting and poetry travel."³ Yet, he was, as Donald Davidson rightly points out, "no art-for-art's sake aesthete, but a man of broadest intellectual capacity and intense moral purpose."⁴ His interest in non-literary forms of art began to develop while he lived abroad. Intoxicated by post-impressionist paintings and modern music, which he had found in Paris in his early days, and by the barbaric color and the rhythmic splendor of the Russian ballet, Fletcher determined to "forget every rule and precedent, and to bring out a poetry which would follow the life spirit, the inner rhythm of [his] own moods, and not some preconceived pattern imposed by [his] mind upon nature."⁵ His second wife, Charlie May Simon⁶ recalls that one experience which caused him to become "free and wild and untrammelled in form was Nijinsky's magnificent dancing in Spectre de la Rose."⁷ As early as 1918 he was studying and writing about art: Paul Gauguin, His Life and Art was being planned then, although it was not published until three years later. His interest in Gauguin was more than that of an art critic or historian:

¹Life Is My Song, pp. 103-105.

²By 1935 his art criticism had been published in such journals as the International Studio (London), The Print Collectors' Quarterly, Art Work, and the Arts of New York. In other direct ways Fletcher also showed his dedication to art. During 1935, for instance, he was actively engaged in raising money by subscriptions to support the Little Rock Symphony.

³Twentieth-Century Authors, p. 466.

⁴"In Memory of John Gould Fletcher," Still Rebels, Still Yankees, p. 33.

⁵Life Is My Song, p. 64.

⁶The second Mrs. Fletcher, whose article about homesteading in the Ozarks first attracted Fletcher, was an author of children's books. They were married in 1936.

⁷Johnswood, pp. 165-166.

I deliberately chose Paul Gauguin . . . because in him I sense something close to my own smoldering revolt and disgust with nineteenth century progressive civilization. Gauguin had preferred savagery, as Rousseau and Thoreau had; and I felt now facing the reality of tanks and submarines and poison gas and airplanes and incendiary bombs that all three were right.¹

In addition to this study and his nine books of poetry published between 1915 and 1930,² Fletcher turned to folk history in his John Smith--Also Pochantas (1928) and a form of popular art, The Crisis in the Film (1929).

His interests embraced world literature and world history as well as folk history and art of the Southwest. Davidson points out that long before the vogue for literature in translation, Fletcher proposed to edit a "Modern European Library" of Unamuno, Spitteler, Berdyaev, Ramez, and Claudel, but he was turned down by every publisher he approached. Even his insights into the psychology of American and Russian social and economic systems, and his analysis of their strengths and weaknesses failed to make an impression, perhaps because the book, The Two Frontiers, was published during the depression. Fletcher regarded its failure to "reach even a small and select audience . . . the most damaging blow I had as yet received during my career as an author."³ The reason, he felt, was to be found in his "entirely new and unexpected angle of insight," its uniqueness making it more difficult for the book to make its way nowadays, in this age of mass production and mass propaganda."⁴ That he was

¹Life Is My Song, pp. 261-62. Fletcher's book revealed an understanding of Gauguin both as man and artist, judging from a letter his son Emil had written to Fletcher. In it he praised Fletcher's art sense, his clarity of expression and his profound knowledge of his father and his work. (Letter, August 15, 1921, in the John Gould Fletcher Collection at Yale University Library.) In 1925 he attempted to write a play based on the encounter of Gauguin and Van Gogh. Again, he felt a personal identification with his subjects: "It seemed to me that the subject of . . . these two men, the sophisticated Parisian turned nature worshiper and the Dutch evangelist turned painter, . . . struggling with the corruptions of the age, offered magnificent dramatic material. It also touched on my own life at several points, since both Van Gogh and Gauguin were exiles." (Life Is My Song, p. 318.)

²These included Irradiations, Sand and Spray (1915), Goblins and Pagodas (1916), Japanese Prints (1918), The Tree of Life (1918), Breakers and Granite (1921), Branches of Adam (1926), The Black Rock (1928), and Preludes and Symphonies (1930).

³Before the appearance of his "Study in Historical Psychology," Fletcher had considerable difficulty in finding a publisher; he wrote Tate in May, 1929, that his manuscript on American culture, which he conceived as a kind of reply to Mumford's Golden Day, had been turned down by four publishers; they felt it would not sell because it set forth certain parallels with Russian culture, he said.

⁴Life Is My Song, p. 353. Reviewing the book for the New Republic, Tate found the study a "penetrating criticism of the American spirit," a "prose 'Waste Land' or a 'City of Dreadful Night,'" imaginatively impressive. ("The Twin Monsters," LXII [March 19, 1930], 132.)

interested in regional history and art, particularly in his own Southwest, is evident from several activities he became involved in during the 1930's: participation in the University of Virginia Round Table on Regionalism in 1931; attending conferences at Las Vegas in 1933 where he met B. A. Botkin and at St. Louis in 1934 when he met Constance Rourke at the National Folk Festival; a study of Indian life in New Mexico in 1933; writing The Epic of Arkansas (for which he was commissioned by the leading newspaper of Little Rock) in honor of his state's centenary (1936). His research for this poem, later revised and published in South Star (1941) led to his full-length study of Arkansas, (1947).¹ In Fletcher's opinion the Epic was one of the two great achievements of his lifetime, the other being his Selected Poems, for which he received the Pulitzer Prize in 1939, the first Southern poet to be so honored. For the last seventeen years of his life, his happiest, he made his piéd à terre in his native region, living near Little Rock in a low grey field-stone house he had built, overlooking the Arkansas River and mountainous pine-covered ridges.

Fletcher's expressions of anti-industrial and regional convictions continued to appear in his poetry of the 1930's and 1940's. In addition to frequent publication in such regional journals as the Southwest Review, the Southern Review, the University of Kansas City Review, and the New Mexico Quarterly, his collections of poems were evidence of his conviction that "regional culture cannot exist and flourish in an atmosphere of intensive industrialism."² Fletcher's XXIV Elegies (one for each hour of the day) appeared in 1935 as a publication of Writers' Editions, "a cooperative group of writers living in the Southwest who believe that regional publication will foster the growth of American literature."³ The titles of the poems suggest his focus and something of his approach to a modern industrial society: "Elegy on the Building of Washington Bridge," "Elegy on an Empty Skyscraper," "Elegy on a Gothic Cathedral," etc. Similarly, his last volume of poems, The Burning Mountain (1946), celebrates the land, in particular the prairie, the Ozarks, the Santa Fe trail and its legend; the collection ends with a condemnation of what the twentieth century had become. Written in June, 1943, "To the Twentieth Century" pleads in conclusion:

. . . Let there be now no more
The factory smoke that drifts from door to door
Bringing back drunken wailing that another conscript
soldier
Has gone to lay down his life for another set of
tyrants,

¹Published by the University of North Carolina Press, Arkansas included a history of the territory's settlement from the days of the Spanish conquistadors to the state's industrialization by the mid 1940's.

²Fletcher, "Cultural Aspects of Regionalism," Round Table on Regionalism, University of Virginia, July 9, 1931.

³(Santa Fe, New Mexico), back of title page. Fletcher wrote a friend in 1944 that XXIV Elegies contains some of his best work and is one of three books he was most proud of having written.

Let there be sun for long and the slow, steady
 twining
 Of the vine about the fig-tree. Thus in some
 future season,
 When the door is shut on the two-faced God, and
 Janus is cold and rotten
 Men may salute with pride and hope some other century.¹

From descriptions and recollections of his wife and friends, as well as from his own comments, one may infer that Fletcher was a man of strong feelings and passionate loyalties. That he was devoted to his friends and principles is apparent in his letters and autobiography. One exchange between him, Donald Davidson, and other members of the Agrarian group focused on a controversy over publication in the 1935 anniversary number of the Virginia Quarterly Review. Fletcher's championing of Davidson and his tendency to be carried away in the passion of his defense of friendship are apparent in the flurry of letters wherein he revealed his anger over the fact that Davidson's article, after considerable delay, had been refused by the Virginia Quarterly Review while the contributions by Tate, Ransom, and Warren had been accepted.² If the other Agrarians were willing to have their articles printed without Davidson's, then, he threatened, he would withdraw his name from the list of Agrarians. Two days later he asked Davidson, rhetorically, if he should sacrifice a sacred matter of principle for the sake of some vague, sentimental "unity" that he felt never existed among them before.³

Fletcher was a lonely, restless wanderer who needed close friendships, especially in his early years, but he retreated from those which might have been established, and sometimes through his tempestuousness lost those he had enjoyed. As a child "there was something about him . . . that made it easier to be friends with trees and clouds or dreams than with the rest of the world. . . . Though he felt the need of friendship to take the edge off his loneliness, each offer made was looked upon with doubt and hesitation."⁴ At times he would mar a friendship with his uncontrollable anger, lashing out at friends in letters or conversations, then getting over his fury or displeasure quickly.⁵ Sometimes the breaches were never bridged. During his lifetime he suffered periodic mental breakdowns before the final one when apparently he took his own life. He was found dead in a pool near his estate on May 10, 1950.

¹p. 96.

²Davidson's essay, later published in the American Review (Summer, 1935) under the title "I'll Take My Stand: A History," was written in answer to an article by H. L. Mencken. See above, pp. 382ff.

³Letters to Davidson, March 11, 13, 1935. Fletcher's charge that the group had never enjoyed a real unity was an exaggeration, although understandable. Through personal friendships and a body of shared convictions about the South and the good life, the sense of community was more real than Fletcher recognized, or at least acknowledged, in the heat of his passionate charges.

⁴Johnswood, pp. 49, 59.

⁵Ibid., p. 75.

But it is as a literary artist that he is finally judged. If his achievement as a poet is to be fairly described, his work after the first glow of the "Poetic Renaissance" experiments must also be considered. Fletcher was clearly a poet for whom intellectual convictions dominated the lyric impulse; his experiments with sound patterns, connotative images and colors, and "preoccupations with contrapuntal arrangement"¹ suggest a consciousness about poetic creation which gave, at times, the impression of "thought dragging too hard upon inspiration, sheer flight impeded by a prodding intellect."² Yet his ideas about the nature of poetry, his judgments of other poets, his approaches to expressing his dedication to poetic imagination are never dull. While they appear eclectic, they are also individual. His "Preface" to Goblins and Pagodas (1916) asserts not only his pessimism about civilization embroiled in a World War but also his attempt to utilize in his own poetry the "cardinal doctrine of Zen Buddhism": the "interdependence of man and inanimate nature." "The Ghosts of an Old House" wherein he sought to relate his childish terror concerning a certain old house and its surroundings³ embodied this theory.

Fletcher's observations as a critic were at once personal and perceptive: he found in Edward Arlington Robinson a "steadfast respect for ideals which proved inadequate to hold back the disruptive tides of scientific commercialism."⁴ Lindsay, who was for Fletcher, too "democratic," too "robustious," not truly an artist--and thus "he is an American"--nevertheless had one good piece of fortune as a poet: he had realized, Fletcher found, that to produce community art he must express its folk-lore, the life of the community.⁵ In 1930 Fletcher commented that Faulkner's Soldier's Pay was the work of a very fine talent, far superior to Wolfe's Look Homeward, Angel, which he was reading at the time. In Poe, a "homelessness is reflected," a contrast to later literary expatriates, Fletcher pointed out: "whereas their lives were spent abroad, he became an exile by staying at home."⁶ Some years earlier he had noted that Poe's poems were "not so much an escape from life as a total evasion of it. His art inhabits a magic circle of his own contriving. . . ."⁷ (By contrast Fletcher was an expatriate physically; his work was thoroughly involved with "our doomed century" and he understood "the dominant psychology of the American people who 'know little else but rootless change.'"⁸

¹Harvey Curtis Webster, "Music vs. Eloquence," [Review of Burning Mountain] Poetry, LXIX (March, 1947), 356.

²Harriet Monroe, "Comment: John Gould Fletcher," p. 206.

³Goblins and Pagodas, pp. xvii-xviii.

⁴"Some Contemporary American Poets," Chapbook, II (May, 1920), 2.

⁵Ibid., p. 20.

⁶Muse Anthology of Modern Poetry, Poe Memorial Edition (New York, 1938), p. 18.

⁷Edgar Allan Poe, The Pamphlet Poets (New York, 1926), p. 6.

⁸Webster, p. 354.

No one who has read Fletcher's poetry and criticism from pre-World War I days to the post-Hiroshima era can doubt that his vision of the poet was Shelleyan and that his own work was imbued with this sense of mission. But a pessimism, too, was pervasive in his writing. The root of civilization was, he felt, diseased from the decay spread by the machine, by technological "progress." In one of his notebooks entitled "Thoughts of a Pessimist," Fletcher jotted down the conviction that each generation makes its own mistakes. His own generation's, he felt, was to assume that modern inventions made the world better, and the penalty for that mistake, he observed, was then being exacted. Fletcher depicted in his poetry the effects of technology as early as 1913: a deserted factory was "this sombre empty shell, . . . this prison of splendid squalor" from which its slaves had fled.¹ His polyphonic prose became the medium by which he sought to capture the raucous, shrill effect of a mechanized America as he saw it in 1916:

Immense machines are clamouring, rattling, battling, wheeling, screaming, heaving, weaving. The wheels moan and groan and roar and waver and snap and go on as before. Between the cities, over plain and hill, reel double paths of shining steel, where screaming locomotives pass like black shuttles leaving grey trails of smoke amid the wheat, the cattle, the corn, the cotton, the sordid, hideous factory shafts. . . .²

And in the 1930's he found, as Henry Adams had before, a contrasting power between the stones of the Gothic cathedral and a factory-machine-dynamo civilization:

For now the world you [the cathedral] knew of old
is changed;

Now the red factory chimneys here and there
Hold in their hearts a magic to make vain
The magic that you spread upon the earth:
Now they lift violently, insolently aloft
Warlike black smoke-flags flying over earth.
And the huge trains,
Black, ugly belching smoke,
With locomotive-shrieks and iron wheels
Roar underneath your old walls day and night,
Disintegrating slowly stone from crumbling stone.

.
While through the sky like dragon-flies there pass
Slim, flickering aeroplanes!
And in the very face of these steep towers,
Cliff-walled, making to heaven their desperate cry,
Behind walls of concrete there spins a wheel
That spurts with blue sparks of a self-made flame;
God in the dynamo calls men to sacrifice.

¹"The Deserted Factory," The Dominant City (London, 1913), p. 9.

²"America," Breakers and Granite (New York, 1921), p. 145.

III

Yet though none kneels and marvels and no mind
 Finds here the peace and certitude it seeks,
 Since peace and certitude are not for man;
 I, faithless son of man, will kneel and feel
 The life that surges slowly through old stone.¹

Just four years before his death he sent to his friends as a Christmas poem "The Tree at Hiroshima." The cause and nature of his despair at that time are clearly revealed in the opening stanzas:

Upon the Christian Christmas Tree of life
 Which has known nineteen centuries of struggle and decay,
 High in the branches dangling, last of the glittering
 lights
 Science has brought to man, symbol of death, not life,
 We find at last today
 The atomic bomb.

Will it destroy those branches, can it blast
 All greenery back, make the boughs bare and stark
 As those that stood at Hiroshima, over the ravaged
 field,
 Where forty thousand feet above, the cloud rose dark,
 And the vast blast of horror never concealed
 That which mankind in blindness here had done
 To end--as Cain once did--an enemy:
 Blotting with ninety thousand dead the rising sun
 Of long-hoped victory?²

It was against such implications and horrors that Fletcher throughout his life had fought, as an Agrarian, as a poet, as a man. His final illness and death, it has been said, were the result of the rage and despair of a sensitive man confronted with "the Machine Age and its Machine Wars."³

¹"Elegy on a Gothic Cathedral," XXIV Elegies, p. 59.

²John Gould Fletcher Collection, Yale University Library.

³Mrs. John Gould Fletcher, Twentieth Century Authors, Supplement, 1955, p. 331.

HENRY BLUE KLINE (1905-1951)

Less well known nationally than any of the other contributors--he is the only Agrarian not listed in a Who's Who in America--Henry Blue Kline had a career more varied, less academically oriented than did any of the other eleven Southerners: clearly he was not an agrarian in practice or even in inclination, and one of his close friends remarked that he never really understood how Henry came to be tied up with the Agrarians since he was no farmer and he had never even had a plow in his hands, so far as he knew.

Nevertheless, if being a Southerner by birth and environment meant at that time that thus one was "by nature" an agrarian, Kline was "naturally" an agrarian; his birthplace was Nashville, and his education was secured primarily in the South, except for the period of later adolescence: he attended Massey Military School in Pulaski, Tennessee, graduated from a high school in Rochester, New York, and after two years at the Case Institute of Technology in Cleveland, transferred to Vanderbilt University where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1928 and his Master's in English and French in 1929. His special fields of interest, in addition to his majors, were Southern life, customs, and economics.

For more than a year after his graduation, unable to find a teaching post, Kline considered other kinds of jobs. Writing Davidson wryly about his hopes and doubts and rationalizing about succumbing to the temptations of the commercial world, the twenty-four-year-old unemployed M.A. decided that "a dose of advertising" might be a good thing for him, despite his natural preference for the academic world: "Advertising may sound like treachery to the principles you and I have in common, for it is the distinctive art of industrial progress; but if there's a chance to get into it I must jump at it for it pays well--and I need money. . . . In a way, I think . . . it would help me to a fuller understanding of just what Industrialism means, and so help me to a more intelligent criticism of it. . . ."1 From a letter written several months later (at the time he had finished his contribution to I'll Take My Stand), it is apparent that what Kline would have liked--and indeed had tried unsuccessfully--was the life of a professional writer. To Davidson he confided:

Does it sound like treason to admit that I've finally applied for a job in an advertising agency? So be it, then. Teaching doesn't seem to want me without a Ph.D. . . I've got to get a job somewhere, for I've been doing nothing but writing unsuccessfully for a year now. . . . I'm not especially energetic, but it's damn boring to be doing nothing (writing is enough--or would be if I could sell some of it. And I will sell my stuff, even if it takes till I'm ninety to do it.)2

However, he found a position at the University of Tennessee where he taught English literature and composition during the worst of the

1March 17, 1930.

2June 2, 1930.

depression, from the fall of 1930 to August, 1933, leaving at that time because of a diminished legislative appropriation.¹ From the fact that he never returned to teaching, some of his friends inferred that he may have found the routine and drudgery of freshmen English courses unchallenging, if not stultifying. Kline had a strong dislike for routine and schedules; but as a professor of graduate students, teaching a seminar three or four hours a week, he might have been happy: according to friends he would have been an inspiring teacher and his students would have understood if he had not met his classes every scheduled session.²

For a brief time after his unsuccessful courting of the academic world, he was a supervisor with the Civil Works Administration, compiling basic data. He soon turned to writing, more specifically to journalism, serving as a Knoxville reporter for the Chattanooga Times Tennessee Valley edition. His career then took a more specialized turn when he joined the staff of the Tennessee Valley Authority in July, 1934. From that time until 1941 he held a variety of positions--Chief of the Correspondence Section of the Information Division, Senior Placement Clerk in Personnel, Principal Statistical Clerk in the Commerce Department, Assistant Transportation Economist, Junior Research Assistant in the Department of Power Planning, Junior Editor in the Transportation and Industrial Economics Division. From this last post he was promoted in July, 1941, to Associate Industrial Economist, a position for which he did economic research, wrote speeches, fulfilled other professional and public relations assignments, served as an adviser on program planning methods and techniques, and evaluated results. In his last TVA position, Industrial Economist (July 1942 until June, 1944), he wrote as well as helped to plan and coordinate research for a report on regionalized rates.³ Published as a House of Representatives document in 1943, the report served to bolster the case presented by the Interstate Commerce Commission and the Southwestern and Southern states which were protesting the discrimination by Eastern and Northern companies against Southern shippers.⁴ His work for this report was also used in a publication with A. W. Voetgle, Freight Rates: the Interregional Tariff, issued under the auspices of the Institute of Research and Training in the Social Sciences at Vanderbilt University. One of Kline's supervisors, evaluating Kline's career at TVA noted that he was "resourceful, has an excellent understanding of the TVA philosophy of regional development and an unusual understanding of the region and its people."⁵ Apparently he had become, in some degree, a convert to a planned social and economic order.

¹St. Louis Post-Dispatch, November 1, 1951, and personnel files of the Tennessee Valley Authority, summarized by Mrs. Alice D. Harris, Administrative Officer, Division of Personnel, August 29, 1957.

²Interview with A. D. Spottswood, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and Roman Horne, Secretary, International Monetary Fund, Washington, D. C., June 14, 1956.

³Personnel files of TVA.

⁴Interview with A. D. Spottswood and Roman Horne, June 14, 1956.

⁵Personnel files of TVA.

In 1944 he joined the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Economics he found intensely interesting, and his editorials were concerned with such matters as railroad problems, fair-trade laws, taxation, housing, tariffs, and education. After five years as an editorial writer, he left the paper--partly, as Kline himself suggested, because the "style" of his editorials did not please his superior and perhaps also, he said, because some views he expressed did not always coincide with the publisher's. To a friend in August, 1949, he wrote:

I have been looking back at some of my editorials from 1945 and 1946 and I wonder today why they ever got into the paper. Most of them still stand very well doctrinally, but it did take me a long time to learn to express myself well in the peculiar form of the editorial. I don't always ring the bells today, nor, for that matter, does any other writer I know. There is no doubt a germ in the publisher's complaint with my work, but I cannot keep from wondering whether it isn't based even more on a few occasions when the content of something I had written hit him wrong and on some policy differences that have never been laid on the table and candidly discussed.

From his editorials and from friends' recollections of conversations, it becomes clear that "his intellectual development during those years was pretty definitely down the New Deal track."¹

After leaving the Post-Dispatch, Kline took a position with the Atomic Energy Commission in Washington. As Information Officer, he was responsible for getting clearance on all information from the Commission as well as for writing reports and speeches.² This was his last post. He died of uremic poisoning in 1951 and was buried in Knoxville, Tennessee. Surviving were his wife Sue McCluskey Kline and two children, Henry Jr. and Susan.³

In personal appearance Kline was large, ponderous in movement, a "great bear of a man, physically" with "tremendous energy whenever he chose to exert it."⁴ He was the kind of man, a friend observed, who would have enjoyed an idealized life of an earlier South, a life of leisure and gracious manners.⁵ One aspect of the Agrarian view of culture he exemplified: a pleasure in working with his hands. His closest friend on the Post-Dispatch wrote of him:

¹Paul T. David, Director of Governmental Studies, Brookings Institution, Letter to Virginia Rock, June 8, 1956.

²Interview with Paul T. David, September 20, 1957.

³St. Louis Post-Dispatch, November 1, 1951. Mrs. Kline died in 1953, two years later.

⁴Don K. Price, formerly Vice President of the Ford Foundation, at present on the faculty of Harvard University, letter to Virginia Rock, August 7, 1957.

⁵Interview with A. D. Spottswood and Roman Horne, June 14, 1956.

The measures he used to obtain some breadth of margin for his life were sometimes interesting. . . . When the Klines came to St. Louis he selected a barnlike two-story frame house in Clayton, a suburb. The house was vacant, had last been used as a tearoom, there were "Ladies" and "Gentlemen" signs on the bathroom doors, the floors were unlevel, the furnace was verging on nonexistence, and the place seemed about to fall in at any moment. With tireless work he made it exceedingly livable. Though he felt he was clumsy with his hands, and took an inordinately long time to do any manual work, he put together his own record player, made a cabinet for it [he had a fine record collection], and made a dining room table of very large proportions.¹

In still another respect he appeared to perceive the relationship between artifacts of culture and his own mind: "He liked modern architecture for its light and air and also for its look of ideas at work, its march away from stuffiness."²

Kline clearly did not remain an Agrarian of the "conservative" cast of mind--and probably he had never been one. He did share with the group, however, other characteristics. He had a lively, intelligent mind, he was deeply interested in ideas, and--like the Fugitives in their literary views--he was dissatisfied with comfortable and conventional. A friend who lived in Kline's fraternity house recalls that when "Hank" was editor of the University student humor magazine, The Masquerader, "he ran articles for several weeks protesting the refusal of the University library to put the works of Rabelais on the open shelves for easy reading by the general student body."³ In addition to his inquisitive, rebellious mind, he possessed another trait, more distinctively Agrarian in nature: "he had an almost passionate fondness for the wilderness areas of Tennessee."⁴ During his years at the TVA in Knoxville, he frequently took long hikes in the mountains, preferably in the wildest areas.

Although there is no published statement from Kline presenting what he thought about the Agrarian symposium to which he contributed, one friend with whom he talked endless hours on a great variety of subjects, including the happy society and the happy personal life, felt that from what he knows about the way Kline's mind worked, Kline believed "the agrarian revolt was quixotic because of its degree, since within the practicalities the best we can achieve in a modern society is a measure of agrarian living and thinking." A Vanderbilt friend recalls that when he teased Kline about his change from the days of I'll Take My Stand (after his TVA report on differential railway freight rates had appeared),

¹Rufus Terral, editorial writer, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, letter to Virginia Rock, May 23, 1956.

²Ibid.

³Don K. Price, letter to Virginia Rock, August 7, 1957.

⁴Paul T. David, letter to Virginia Rock, June 8, 1956.

⁵Rufus Terral, letter to Virginia Rock, May 23, 1956.

"Henry's half serious answer" was that "as soon as he had caught on to the fact that you could not really have a settled agrarian society without primogeniture and entail, and since Jefferson had made the mistake of abolishing both in the South, he thought that a totally new approach was warranted for the Southern agrarian--and this meant of course TVA, rural electrification, the building up of small industries, and all the rest."¹

Kline's participation in the Agrarian symposium, one friend suggested, can be explained by his rebellious streak, often manifesting itself in a dissatisfaction with the status quo; he never seemed completely adjusted or happy in any situation although his years on the Post-Dispatch were his happiest.² In the final estimate, it would seem, however, that Kline had probably come closer to living a satisfactory life than many people, possibly because he never accepted the existent world as the best of all possible worlds, possibly too because he succeeded in realizing in his own life some of the values for which he fought in I'll Take My Stand. Kline may have revealed more of himself than he intended in his symposium essay on "William Remington"; like Remington he "was graduated with two potentially weighty handicaps . . . some knowledge and appreciation of literature, history, music, and the decorative arts . . . [and] a deeply rooted determination to live his life . . . in terms dictated by his own critical intelligence, and by nothing less." Like Remington, Kline "not very reasonably but naturally . . . sought a closer communion with the ideal of life prevalent in his world, in order to find out its nature and how he did not measure up to it."³

¹Don K. Price, letter to Virginia Rock, August 7, 1957.

²Paul T. David, interview, September 20, 1957.

³I'll Take My Stand, pp. 303, 314.

Early in his career, Lyle Lanier disclosed certain convictions about his personal goals, the nature of science, and of psychology in particular, which were to appear almost as leitmotifs in his activities and writing as Agrarian and psychologist. To Allen Tate he wrote in 1929:

I want to keep on at scientific work on an intensive basis to provide me with materials for speculation and to deserve the right to evaluate scientific achievements critically. . . . I should like to think that sometime I might get far enough along to be able to demand some consideration and recognition when I try to show that what we have had in "scientific" America is a perversion of science in the disinterested sense. Science for its own sake doesn't get us very far, nor do the applications of it always bring benefits, but science for the sake of stimulating reflection has merits. . . . Psychology should be able to furnish a key to open the door of criticism upon conditions as they exist now, for "social destiny" means no more than the intellectual and emotional conditions in particular individuals, as these are determined by the dominant trends of the culture. I have hopes that some day I shall be able to attack these questions with full force.

[November 20, 1929]

That he realized these aims becomes apparent in a study of his views and career as psychologist and teacher.

The broadness and distinctiveness of his conception of science may in part have been the result of his background, his education, the people under whom he studied, his analysis and reactions to the state of American culture and to conditions in the South as he observed their symptoms and effects.

Born in Madison County, Tennessee, on January 11, 1903, Lyle Lanier was the fourth generation of his family to live in Tennessee. His grandfather had fought in the Confederate Army, and his father had farmed for many years. Lanier himself worked on the farm, plowing, picking cotton, and doing many other chores until he was sixteen when his family moved to Nashville.

His early education began in a one-room school house in middle Tennessee where one teacher offered all the subjects. In order to meet the entrance requirements of Vanderbilt, which Lanier wished to attend for his undergraduate degree, he enrolled at Valparaiso University in 1919-1920 where he studied French, mathematics, chemistry and English under excellent teachers. His studies at Vanderbilt included German, French, Spanish and Greek, and his major was changed from English to philosophy, as a result, he has said, of his great admiration for Professor Herbert Sanborn. Lanier received his Bachelor of Arts from Vanderbilt in 1923. The same year he began his work for advanced degrees in psychology at George Peabody College for Teachers under Professor Joseph Peterson, a man who had considerable influence on Lanier and for whom Lanier had the greatest respect. He received his Master of Arts in 1924 and his Ph. D. in 1926. He had also spent the summer of 1925 at the University of Chicago where he conducted various

tests of white and Negro children on part of a research program supported by a grant to Professor Peterson from the National Research Council's Committee on the Scientific Problems of Human Migration. Together with other studies in Nashville and New York City, the results of this work were published as a monograph with Professor Peterson. Titled Studies in the Comparative Abilities of Whites and Negroes,¹ one of its principal speculative hypotheses, formulated by Professor Peterson, was that selective migration may be considered an explanation for the superior performance of Negro school children in the North as compared with those in the South. His doctoral dissertation was a statistical study of the reliability of the kinds of tests used in this research program, published under the title "Prediction of the Reliability of Mental Tests and Tests of Special Abilities," Journal of Experimental Psychology (1927). Other articles by Lanier, based on this research program, include "Comparisons of White and Negro Children on Certain Ingenuity and Speed Tests," Journal of Comparative Psychology (1925), "The Factor of Speed of Reaction in Race Mental Measurement," Journal of the Tennessee Academy of Science (1928), and "An Analysis of Thinking Reactions of White and Negro Children," Journal of Comparative Psychology (1930).

In 1927, while an instructor at New York University, Lanier married Catherine Baxter Nichol. They have two children, Lyle Hicks and Catherine Dean. (Mrs. Lanier is a cousin of Lytle and Lanier himself is a distant relation of the Georgian poet, Sidney Lanier.)

After two years at New York University, Lanier returned to Vanderbilt where he was an assistant professor of psychology from 1928-1938. During this period he became involved in the Agrarian movement, contributing two important essays to the symposiums, I'll Take My Stand and Who Owns America?² Lanier's orientation led him to view American capitalistic society as it appeared in the Coolidge-Hoover period in terms appropriate to a psychologist: a belief in "progress," he felt, had become a romanticized type of rationalization and the Agrarian attack was directed against a central psychological factor--a sort of reasoning that equated big business and materialistic values with industrialization as a highly desirable goal in itself.³ A year before I'll Take My Stand was published, he wrote Tate:

Human nature hasn't changed, and economic pressure remains perhaps the primary of motives. The average Southerner has no more notion of what was lost with the Civil War than the average Southerner of that time knew what he possessed. There was not, nor is there now, any general awareness of the eternal pity of the thing--that an indigenous culture so unique in its pattern should have been demolished by another inherently inferior. (Inferior in the sense that it makes for disintegration in human lives.) We cannot restore that culture, although we can

¹Mental Measurements Monographs, No. 5 (1929), 156 pp. See pp.158-161 above for a fuller summary.

²For a discussion of Lanier's views in his symposia essays, "A Critique of the Philosophy of Progress" and "Big Business and the Property State," see pp. 283-86 and 392-93 above.

³Interview, September 26, 1957.

use it, because it is part of us, to try to formulate a social philosophy that may become an efficient agent in the world of ideas. Such philosophy may be used to advantage when the show-down comes with reference to just what the scientific movement means.

[November 20, 1929]

After a decade of teaching at Vanderbilt, Lanier returned east to head the Department of Psychology at Vassar from 1938-1948. For the next two years he held the same post at New York University. Since 1950 he has been at the University of Illinois, as chairman of the Department of Psychology from 1950-1959, then as dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; in the summer of 1960 he became Vice-President and Provost.

Concomitant with teaching, Lanier has been involved in a variety of professional activities: he was research associate for the National Defense Research Committee Project at Princeton in 1944; executive director of the Committee on Human Resources (Department of Defense) in 1947-1948; chairman of the Research Advisory Board, Air Training Command, 1948-1951; director of the Social Science Research Council (1949-1951, 1956-); a member of the advisory panel on psychobiology of the National Science Foundation (1952-1956) and of the Divisional Committee for Biological and Medical Sciences (1960-). Like other Agrarians, Lanier has edited a journal, the Psychological Bulletin, from 1947-1952. Among the professional organizations in which he has been active are the American Psychological Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology (of which he was secretary-treasurer from 1931-1936 and President in 1936-1937); the Eastern Psychological Association (treasurer from 1941-1947). In addition to the articles and monographs already named, Lanier published, with others, Sensation--Its Mechanism and Disturbances (1935). His professional activities and publications in the areas of race, experimental and physiological psychology have made him nationally known.

Yet Lanier was and is no narrow specialist. His concern for the state of culture and the relation of technology and science to the solution of social problems led him to observe in 1939 that the optimism and blind faith of social scientists--who believe that the development of the proper scientific attitude and skills would solve our social problems--will no longer suffice:

For if one seeks evidence of effective control over social events, the search would seem to lead most directly to Hitler and Stalin, not to the social scientists. . . . The scientist is forced to contemplate the appalling paradox that science--the systematic use of intelligence--is found to have improvised its own means of destruction.¹

His questioning is based not only on observation of the contemporary scene but on an understanding of the nature of man and society and the austere, in fact impossible, demands to be met if the regulation of society is to become truly "scientific." The logical implications of such a hope, in his opinion, deny a realization, for the optimistic expectation has been based on "the mistaken notion that 'intelligent' action is synonymous with scientific action, in a concrete instance of adjustment."² It is Lanier's

¹"Science and Society," Southern Review, V (Summer, 1939), 106.

²Ibid., p. 119.

conviction that "whatever happens in the universe of social events can be attributed to antecedent configurations of natural conditions, and yet [one can] deny that the process of social control can become, in the technical sense of the term, scientific."¹ Scientific experiment, in his opinion, offers no solution to difficult social problems. If the answer is anywhere, he felt, it "will be found to lie, in some fashion, within the framework of what we are pleased to call the 'democratic process.'" Admitting that this will seem a "relativistic conception of validity," Lanier nevertheless concludes that while we may "never arrive at a neat system of formal social truths, . . . we should perhaps avoid the tyranny of the social paranoiac."²

In yet another way the breadth and balance of Lanier's views are revealed. To the Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology, Lanier as President not only justified the interdependence of the two disciplines--"the relations between psychology and philosophy are intrinsic and fundamental"--but also maintained that "there is definitely a place for a philosophy of natural events which concerns itself with the general significance of all forms of scientific description as well as with other possible types of 'knowing' or 'experiencing.'"³ Psychology, as Lanier views it, is far more inclusive than those oriented to a study of physiology and anatomy would have it. For Lanier, psychology is the "science of human behavior," and this includes "not merely overt motor responses, but also . . . such characteristic human activities as perceiving, imagining, wishing and thinking." These terms, Lanier asserts, are used in "commonsense connotations, in order to indicate that 'behavior' need not be defined as mere muscle twitching."⁴

As a psychologist, Lanier considers himself a "monist" rather than a "dualist." That is, he believes that "monism will prove to be far more serviceable than dualism as a foundation for psychological investigations," dualism in this context being explained as "the postulation of a fundamental duality in nature, in accordance with which psychological events are assumed to be qualitatively different from all other events," while "natural monism asserts that psychological events are continuous with all other events, and with the latter comprise the whole of nature." Lanier's analysis and justification of the postulate of monism for psychology suggests parallels with the Agrarian concern for the creation of an organic culture. This is not to say that Lanier blurred the nature of the psychologist as a man, subject like other men to personal interests and emotional attachments,⁶ nor is it implied that Lanier believed the psychologist in his desire to be "scientific" should attempt to force the evidence to fit a particular framework:

It is not the business of the psychologist to sit in judgment upon nature, to require that she exhibit only those properties which can be

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 120.

³"The Descriptive Categories of Psychology," Psychological Monographs, L (1950), 212, 214.

⁴Ibid., p. 220

⁵Ibid., p. 216.

⁶"Science and Society," p. 119.

conveniently investigated. In order to be scientific it is not necessary to distort phenomena by moulding them into an arbitrary and oversimplified conceptual pattern. The psychologist must accept with a considerable degree of naïveté the world of psychological events as they are presented to him. He has only one limitation, or perhaps it is his principal advantage: his account of these events must be a scientific account, not a poetic or a philosophical account. . . .¹

To a charge which many of the Agrarians had leveled against science, Lanier answered in 1950 that "science is grossly misunderstood by the individuals who criticize it because of its abstractness and consequent lack of the concrete richness of 'living experience.'"² The basis of the misunderstanding, Lanier implies, is a misconception about the nature of a scientific account: it is a map, not a comprehensive description, nor should it be considered as such: "If there are aspects of experience which cannot be mapped, . . . it is better to recognize this limited function of science than to try to force the scientific account to become a poor replica of the whole of reality." Philosophy, too, Lanier observes, is "a map account of reality, and in most respects a map far more abstract than those of the sciences. . . ."³ Lanier gives evidence that he had, in fact, never deserted his first love, philosophy, and that he did, indeed, come back to her⁴; for he concludes: "I hasten to add that the philosophic map is a far more comprehensive map than those of the sciences; a world map perhaps; indeed, a map which may even be colored!"⁵

Late in 1935 Lanier wrote a memorial article to honor his former professor and friend, Dr. Joseph Peterson. Many of the comments not only suggest the influence of Dr. Peterson on Lanier, but also reveal something of the character and convictions of Lanier himself. Like his mentor, Lanier, too, saw little value in "futile controversies among the 'schools'"; and "his predilection" also was "for crucial experiment rather than arm-chair systematization." Lanier's "monistic" point of view is as clearly expressed as that of Dr. Peterson, who had "conceived all adjustive processes to be organic operations rather than arbitrary expressions of extra-organic truth." Just as Peterson "was impatient with those philosophers [who] would restrict science to the role of supplying the practical needs arising in man's routine existence,"⁶ so Lanier, early in his career was concerned about those psychologists who were dualists, insisting on the "mind-body bifurcation"; in Lanier's opinion, this split "constitutes one of the most serious impediments to sound psychological progress."⁷ Through

¹"The Descriptive Categories of Psychology," p. 222.

²Ibid., p. 236.

³Ibid., p. 236.

⁴Letter to Allen Tate, November 20, 1929.

⁵"Descriptive Categories of Psychology," p. 237.

⁶"Joseph Peterson: Editor, Psychological Monographs, 1934-1935," The Psychological Review, XLIII (January, 1936), 1, 7-8.

⁷"Educative Psychology," [review of Educational Psychology by Charles Fox], New Republic, XLIX (February 9, 1927), 337.

more than three decades Lanier has sought in his research to be true to the concrete realities while discovering the related aspects of a body of data. Like his Agrarian colleagues who were poets and literary critics, he criticized in his own field the "atomistic" and "heterogeneous."¹ He has unquestionably realized a hope he expressed to Tate a year before the publication of the Agrarian symposium: to "earn the right to criticize or evaluate science without laying [myself] liable to the charge that such criticism is 'external and arbitrary.'"²

¹This charge was made against discussions of industrial psychology and appeared in the course of Lanier's "An Evaluation of the Annual Review of Psychology" [Vols. I-IV], Psychological Bulletin, LI (1954), 180-190. Lanier also criticized these studies for using "inadequate samples, uncontrolled conditions, and uncertain criteria."

²Letter to Allen Tate, November 20, 1929.

Born in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, a town established on sixty acres of land donated by an ancestor, Andrew Lytle has distinguished himself as a biographer, teacher, critic, and author of fine short stories and novels.

Like his Agrarian friends, Lytle found his heritage, his education, and his experience in living close to the land rich sources of material for his fiction as well as shaper of his perceptive absorbing criticism.

After attending Sewanee Military Academy and spending a year studying in France, Lytle returned to his native Tennessee to attend Vanderbilt University from which he graduated in 1925. It was here that he made friends with some of the Fugitives whom he was to join later in their Agrarian symposium and in Who Owns America?

Lytle has been involved with farming off and on since his adolescence, although he is now an artist and "no proper farmer," he says. He managed his father's cotton farm, Cornsilk,¹ a year before entering Yale and during the depression he combined writing with farming. At the Yale School of Drama, which he attended from 1927-1928, he was a member of George Pierce Baker's 47 Workshop, and for a time the theater, in particular acting, appeared to be his chosen career. He tried his hand at playwriting and acted with the Hampton Players, a Yale University group who started a summer theater at Southampton, L.I. For a short time in 1929 he was a member of a Broadway production of The Grey Fox while doing research at the New York Public Library for his first book, a biography of Nathan Bedford Forrest. Lytle's interest in the theater continued after he returned to Cornsilk during the lean years of the Depression, although he never became a professional playwright (despite the fact that one play written at Yale was produced later): some of his distinctive qualities as a writer of fiction were already apparent in his plays--his fine rendering of dialogue, his ability to tell a haunting story well, his transformation of Southern materials into art. John Crowe Ransom, highly impressed with a play Lytle had been writing, observed in a letter to Tate:

He read me some scenes of a play which was magnificent: Southern character stuff, very broad, not quite farcical, obviously something that would be a revelation on Broadway because of its color and picturesque quality if Andrew doesn't try to make a fine subtle consecutive play out of it. Comic, not tragic. I urged him to go ahead and be content to start with that, not to write the Great Southern Play the first time.

[October 25 (1932)--dated by Tate]

Lytle's career and interests in some respects were remarkably similar to those of his friends and former Fugitives. During a period of some ten years at Cornsilk, he wrote a number of book reviews, short stories, and one novel, The Long Night. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for creative work in fiction for 1940 and 1941. He also held the Kenyon Fellowship for fiction in 1956.

In 1938 he married Edna Langdon Barker. They have three daughters.

¹Cornsilk was the farm Lytle loved most. It was covered over by a T.V.A. dam at Guntersville, Alabama.

Eventually Lytle's education and interest in writing led him to teaching. He has held positions at Southwestern College and the University of the South, where he was a professor of history and managing editor of the Sewanee River (1942-43). In 1946 he became lecturer at the University of Iowa School of Writing. He joined the faculty of the University of Florida in the following year, where he has been lecturer in creative writing since 1948. In the summer of 1954 he was leader of the humanities division of an international seminar held at Harvard.

Like Tate, Davidson, and Warren, Lytle also turned to the Civil War and his Southern heritage to write a prose encomium to his region and people. A Civil War general was the ostensible subject: Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company (1931) celebrated not only the military genius and the heroic "devotion and selflessness" of the "Wizard of the Saddle" but also the plain people, the culture and the world they represented. Forrest, as Lytle depicted him in a biography written with dramatic and novelistic techniques, was cast by the new Machiavellians' "War-is-Hell" view into the role of an avenger. For Lytle there was a personal as well as a sectional identification with Forrest. Dedicating his biography to his grandmother, Molly Greaves Nelson, "who heard on the hard turnpike the sudden beat of his horses' hoofs and the wild yell of his riders,"¹ Lytle disclosed a bit of family history in the Introduction to the Revised Edition, an account which suggests a factor contributing to his "Southern bias" appearing later in political and historical essays and book reviews. His grandmother "as a little girl was playing outside her house with other children," Lytle recounts:

A Union soldier up the street shot into the crowd of children and she was hit in the neck just short of the jugular vein. When she ran into the house to her nurse, the blood was in her shoe and covered an apple she still held in her hand. Nobody ever knew why the man shot into the group of children. He got on his horse and galloped out of town and was never seen again, and was certainly not apprehended by his own officers.²

The admiration for the style of the biography, as expressed by Henry Steele Commager who found Lytle's "homely, earthy, idiomatic English" a "success," "a happy vehicle for the personality it describes,"³ would be equally appropriate for almost any of his fiction that followed. From his first novel, The Long Night (1936), to his most recent, The Velvet Horn (1957), Lytle reveals both a consciousness and command of his craft. Within the compass of his four novels and such haunting short stories as "Jericho, Jericho, Jericho," "The Guide" and "Mister MacGregor,"⁴ Lytle has embodied

¹Dedication, Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company (New York, 1960), [p. v].

²Ibid., p. xiv.

³"The Terror of the Damyankees," p. 266.

⁴"Jericho, Jericho, Jericho" (1936) in a sense represents the passing of an old order through the recollections of an eighty-seven year old dying matriarch, Kate McCowan. "The Guide," recently renamed "The Mahogany Frame" on the suggestion of Allen Tate, focuses on an archetypal experience,

a coherent set of values rendered through a variety of settings and times. The Long Night, widely reviewed when it first appeared, was admired for its historical realism, its effective telling of a vendetta carried on against the backdrop of the Civil War, its remarkable depiction of the Battle of Shiloh, and its "vivid and powerful . . . visualization of a dead-and-gone countryside and culture."¹ Elmer Davis considered it "one of the finest first novels of recent years," suggestive in its army scenes of Tolstoy's War and Peace.²

At the Moon's Inn (1941) moves back in time to the sixteenth century and a primitive but coherent culture. Representing episodes of DeSoto's unsuccessful attempts to conquer the Florida Indians, Lytle sought in this novel, according to John Bradbury, to convey a way of life beyond the comprehension of the single-minded Spanish adventurers, representative of an early version of capitalistic exploitation in contrast to the Indians whose way of life is equated with agrarian devotion to the land.³

In a completely different mode but again reflecting his central concern for the values of a traditional culture and the effects from its loss, A Name for Evil (1947) plays against an eerie atmosphere reminiscent of the Turn of the Screw, a realistic dialogue in a series of problems confronting a young couple who have undertaken to renovate an old house. The ambiguously horrifying end of the novel is heightened by the preceding realism.

Lytle's recent novel, The Velvet Horn, is his most intricate, allusive, symbolic dramatization of a search for wholeness, for unity, for spiritual authority. Although the novel is written about a family--the Crees and Croleighs--living during the post-Civil War period in the Cumberland forest region, it embodies a myth, or as Lytle has described it, an archetypal experience that forever recurs, is immortal, timeless; it was this universality, this continuance that Lytle rendered in the shapes "that seem to harden and die, . . . the manners and mores that are unique to a given society."⁴ The Velvet Horn, Lytle disclosed, has taught him that "the action must be symbolic of the archetypal experience. . . . The symbol must be more than an inert sign or emblem."⁵ To follow the narrative and

the initiation ritual--a boy's coming to manhood" through the "accident" of a duck-hunt. "Mister MacGregor" depicts a pre-Civil War relationship between slave and master, the Negro coachman killed in a fight to the death because he sought to call "his marster to account" for whipping his wife. Recently reprinted in A Novel, A Novella and Four Stories (1958), these stories were described in a New York Times book review as "marvels of compression and psychological subtlety. . . ." (Frank Lyell, August 31, 1958, p. 6).

¹"A Striking First Novel," Saturday Review of Literature, XIV (September 12, 1936), 11.

²Ibid.

³The Fugitives: A Critical Account, p. 268.

⁴"The Working Novelist and the Mythmaking Process," p. 146.

⁵Ibid., p. 149.

symbolic complexities of Lucius Cree's initiation into life and experience, through the guidance of his uncle, is to realize the truth of one critic's judgment of the novel: it is "to come under the spell of realizations that prepare the mind to receive still others of the kind, continually deepening its capacity."¹

In his social and literary criticism, Lytle manifests his central convictions as a Southerner and artist. Vigorous, imaginative, unequivocating, Lytle's essays and reviews interpreting or commenting on the Southern scene, historical figures and events are unmistakably Southern and Agrarian in point of view. A tradition-based culture which had existed in the South, he believes, has been fragmented through the dissolution of attachment to place, through the "dislocation and slow destruction of the family as an institution"²--the results of the increase of industry, the spread of the automobile, the artificiality and rapid tempo of twentieth-century culture and the dominance of materialistic values. His Agrarian convictions of 1930 were repeated in 1960:

We have put our faith in the machine. This is the concrete showing of the nature of our change. We view the technology of its laws as if they were as automatic as nature's. But the machine is not nature. It is man-conceived but not man-controlled; hence the monstrosity in serving it. The machine was meant to ease and speed up man's business a little, not change the look of nature. If it keeps up, it will change the nature of man, for we are moving so fast nobody is still long enough to see what is before him.³

For Lytle the most disturbing changes in our culture are the realizations that "we are losing that immediate and substantial sense of our surroundings which remind us of our humanity"⁴ and that the family (which he describes as the institution of Southern life⁵ and defines to include "all the complex interrelationships of blood and kin, the large 'connections' which extended to the county lines and by sympathy overlapped the states"⁶) no longer carries the authority it once had, no longer represents the "basic unity of the Christian community, and hence the state."⁷

Lytle finds in the attempts of the western will to control nature and the universe evidence that the great change in the world is spiritual, that the vision of the Christian inheritance has diminished to liberty and

¹Brewster Ghiselin, "Trial by Light," Sewanee Review, LXV (October-December, 1957), 665.

²Lytle, "The Displaced Family" [Review of Peter Taylor's Tennessee Day in St. Louis, a play] Sewanee Review, LXVI (Winter, 1958), 115.

³"Introduction," Bedford Forrest . . ., pp. xv-xvi.

⁴Ibid., p. xvi.

⁵"Foreword," A Novel, A Novella and Four Stories, p. xvii.

⁶"The Working Novelist and the Mythmaking Process," p. 142.

⁷"Introduction," Bedford Forrest . . ., p. xvi.

freedom, "secular interpretations of a more complete Christian polity now lost. . . ."¹ These convictions inform both his fiction and his criticism. They serve as the animating impulse from which action and symbol emerge; they constitute the faith and belief which for him show "the fresh light of truth." Art, he believes, is created not by attempting to "prove" something or to portray a society living or dead. In fiction, an idea "must turn flesh" before it is art: "[it] . . . should give the illusion of life. . . ." Thus, art is created: when the "conscious and the intuitive practice of the craft work together," when the "craft is overborne by the stroke of life." This, Lytle believes, is "the flash of miracle . . . the artist's reward. . . ." For Lytle the interest in myth and the act of creation are akin to a mystical spiritual experience. "Perhaps it was of this [the stroke of life] that Blake was thinking when he said the artist continues the act of God."²

Along with the other Agrarians, Lytle has been criticized for venturing into disciplines in which they were amateurs. Speaking for the group, Lytle has answered:

They did not pretend to be other than amateurs in economics and history and theology. But being trained in the word, they might write more convincingly than specialists. They might and did relate economics through history to the immediate situation, as specialists cannot do. This led them at least to see that the local malaise was not endemic but epidemic. The local scene was brought not only into new relationship with this country or Europe but within that of Christian civilization. This perhaps can be called the Southern attitude as distinct from that of the rest of American letters.³

Lytle's faith in his Agrarian Southern heritage is subsumed and shaped into his aesthetic creed; from his common and uncommon grounds of experience, as artist, he draws and re-creates: "the archetypal experience which forever recurs within the human scene."⁴

¹"Foreword," A Novel, A Novella and Four Stories, p. xvi.

²"The Working Novelist and the Mythmaking Process," pp. 143 ff.

³"A Summing Up," "The Southern Literary Renaissance," Shenandoah, VI (Summer, 1953), 33.

⁴"The Working Novelist and the Mythmaking Process," p. 142.

The charge that the Agrarians of I'll Take My Stand were unaware of the underdog and were satisfied simply to produce "a nebulous piece of poetizing about the joys of communion with the soil without definite form or objective"¹ clearly does not characterize Herman Clarence Nixon, Southern historian, political scientist, analyst of economic and social conditions and pleader of causes for the "little people."

Certainly by birth, taste, personality, and experiences, Nixon is Southern. "I am a product of the folkways of the hills," he wrote, ". . . born in a house that burned, by the side of a dirt road that was changed, and across the road from a post office that was discontinued." His birthplace was Merrellton, Alabama, a railroad flag station near Possum Trot, "between Atlanta and Birmingham and about one hundred and twenty miles from Chattanooga . . . in the Northeast . . . county of Calhoun"² (like other Southern writers, Nixon regards the particular locale as important). His Southern agrarianism was rooted in his early experiences: he worked in the fields, helped out in his father's country store, was a young county correspondent who wrote verse for near-by Anniston's paper, the Daily Hot Blast.

Unlike several of his fellow Agrarians, Nixon did not have a "classical" education under tutors or at a private academy. His first school met in a church; later he went to a one-room school house, not "ceiled," heated by a stove stuffed with pine-knots and coal. After attending the State Normal School at Jacksonville, Nixon entered the Alabama Polytechnic Institute at Auburn, a land grant college, where he received the Bachelor and Master of Science degrees in 1909 and 1910. Following a few years of teaching and World War I service with the Ordnance Department of the Army Service Corps and the History Division of Wilson's Peace Commission in France, Nixon went north to continue his education at the University of Chicago where he was much influenced by historian William E. Dodd. Of his teaching Nixon wrote:

From this native North Carolinian and from the readings required in his courses, I got my first appreciation of the difference and cleavage between the Southern Piedmont and the Southern lowlands, whether in Revolutionary times, the Civil War period, or after. I learned that Thomas Jefferson was a democratic product of the Piedmont, that his country and mine once constituted a part of the American West. This new learning was good for my soul. It changed my attitude toward the lowland plantation country, and I no longer had an occasional wish that my people might have been planters.³

Nixon's doctoral dissertation, "The Populist Movement in Iowa," was published in full in the Iowa Journal of History and Politics, January, 1926. "The work on this task," said Nixon, "injected me heartily into agrarian

¹W. J. Cash, Mind of the South, p. 382.

²"Foreword," Lower Piedmont Country, p. xiii.

³Ibid., p. xviii.

material and pushed me toward the liberal side of the agrarian fence."¹

His teaching career began in a Southern locale. Between 1910 and 1922 he was instructor at two Southern institutions--the Alabama State Normal School and Birmingham Southern College. In fact, except for three years of teaching at Iowa State College (1922-25), Nixon's academic activities have centered in Southern institutions: Vanderbilt University (1925-28,² 1940-55), Tulane, where he became head of the Department of History and Political Science (1928-38), and the University of Missouri (1939-40). Since his retirement from Vanderbilt as director of the University Press (1942-52) and Professor of Political Science, Nixon has been "circuit riding," as he describes it; he was a visiting lecturer in political science at Hamilton College, New York, 1955-56; at the College of Wooster, Ohio, 1957-58; and at Alderson-Broadbush College, 1958-60.

As a professional scholar Nixon has done much more than teach. His three books about his native region, appearing between 1938 and 1946, represent his concern for the small farmers, the tenants and sharecroppers, black and white. Of the first book to appear, Forty Acres and Steel Mules (1938), a reviewer for the Journal of Southern History observed, "It could not have been written except by one who has been an alert firsthand observer, and a zealous student for many years of the complicated problems discussed."³ It was, as Nixon describes it, "a hillybilly's view of the South . . . an attempt to interpret the rural South and the village South in the light of the inevitable trends of the times . . . based partly on research, partly on general reading, and largely on direct observation."⁴ Possum Trot, Rural Community South, appearing originally as a series of articles for newspapers and published as a book in 1941, was a plea for social planning, particularly at the county level; Nixon in this study of his native region attempted a micro-cosmic representation of what was happening in many Southern rural

¹Letter to Virginia Rock, July 26, 1960. Nixon's study surveyed conditions of unrest and reform activities in the eighties, and gave special attention to farmers' organizations, both those opposed to and those sympathetic with the idea of a third party. Based on collections of manuscripts and papers, newspaper files, and government documents, this "regional story of a movement in the nineties" concluded that "an economic conservatism in [Iowa] stood in the way of Populist success. The Iowa farmer was interested in reform, not revolution," and while it was an alarm signal, "as a diagnosis it failed to take account of the effect of the disappearance of the frontier. . . . Iowa Populism was a manifestation of a shift from sectionalism toward class division." [Abstracts of Theses, University of Chicago, Humanistic Series, III (1924-25), 207-13.]

²In 1927, a year before Nixon left Vanderbilt for the first time, he married Anne Trice. They have had three children, Elizabeth Jones (dec.), Nicholas Clarence, and John Trice.

³Albert B. Moore, Journal of Southern History, V (November, 1939), 570.

⁴Forty Acres and Steel Mules, p. 3.

communities, losing their agrarian character and closely knit neighborhood spirit which had resulted from a shared and conscious loyalty. "This little book," wrote Professor Charles E. Smith of Louisiana State University, "is for those . . . who appreciate the simplicity of wisdom and the wisdom of simplicity."¹ Lower Piedmont Country (1946) was also a highly personal book. In some respects it is autobiography, ". . . offered," wrote Nixon in his Acknowledgments, "rather consciously in the manner in which I used to cover rural personal items for a county newspaper, sometimes rounding out the space with a biased comment."² Nixon's two textbooks also appeared after 1940. A Short History of the American People, a two-volume work with Frank Owsley and Oliver P. Chitwood, was published in 1945, and seven years later American Federal Government, A General View was issued. Like the other Agrarians, Nixon has contributed articles and book reviews frequently to professional and literary journals, including Social Forces, the Annals of the American Academy of Political Science, the Mississippi Valley Historical Review, the Virginia Quarterly Review, the Southern Review, the South Atlantic Quarterly, the Journal of Political Economy, the Journal of Southern History, the Sewanee Review, and the Journal of Politics.

Nixon's professional activities were not confined to writing and teaching. He has been a member of the editorial board of the Journal of Politics. He has participated frequently in round table or panel discussions on a variety of problems, including one on "New Industrialism in the South" at the University of Virginia's Institute of Public Affairs in 1931, another on "The Southern Demagogue" for the Southern and American Historical Association in 1940. He served as second vice-president of the American Political Science Association in the same year. And he was a member of the Whitney Foundation Seminar held in the fall of 1957 for Fulbright scholars from abroad who came to teach or study for a year in the United States.

In contrast to the stereotype of many academic people, Nixon's perspective--which extends beyond the class room or the study, even beyond his particular region--has developed through a variety of experiences. His activity in Paris with the history research division of the American Peace Commission led him to realize on his return to rural Possum Trot how personal and local were the concerns of his neighbors:

I was back from the center of the world community, with my head full of world problems. But my people were not interested in world problems or in hearing me talk about them. They were more interested in hog-killing weather, "forty-cent cotton," and the merits of different makes of tractors. Possum Trot cared as little about what was going on at Paris as Paris cared about Possum Trot. The world community center and my neighborhood center did not recognize each other and they seemed to have little in common, except an interest in Charlie Chaplin movies.³

¹Review of Possum Trot, Journal of Southern History, VIII (May, 1942), 287.

²p. xi.

³Lower Piedmont Country, p. xx.

The disillusionment he experienced at such parochialism, understandable though it was, probably contributed to his interest in activities intended to educate and improve the conditions of Southern farmers. While he was teaching social science at Birmingham College--it was during an intensive spell of hard times in his region--he spent several weeks in Atlanta, Birmingham, and other centers conducting forums on problems of the South (under the sponsorship of the United States Office of Education).¹ At Tulane, along with his teaching duties, he was director of the Louisiana Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, an experience he valued because it enabled him to see farm problems from a relief administrator's angle.² In 1935 he became the first chairman of the Southern Policy Committee³ composed of liberals, laborites, and agrarians, whose purpose was to publicize the region's need for progressive planning and action. At the 1935 conference a series of private and intensive discussions on such problems as "Democratic Institutions," "Crop Control and Foreign Trade," "Agrarian Policy," "Control of Industry," and "Political Relations with other Nations"⁴ was held under the general chairmanship of Nixon. At this time, Nixon with several other representatives⁵ submitted a supplementary statement that in its thorough-going liberal-socialistic orientation represented a view some other members of the Nashville Agrarians would not have subscribed to;⁶ in this analysis of economic conditions, Nixon and others declared:

¹Ibid., p. xxii.

²Forty Acres and Steel Mules, p. 5.

³Several monographs were published under its sponsorship, including "Southern Population and Social Planning," "Social Security for Southern Farmers" (written by Nixon), "Social Legislation in the South," and "Southern Housing."

⁴H. C. Nixon, "Foreword, Southern Policy," Report of the Southern Policy Conference in Atlanta, April 25-28, 1935, [p. 3].

⁵In addition to Nixon, the statement was signed by Messrs. Brown, Collier, Couch, Hays, Le Breton, J. Charles Poe, and Timm.

⁶Members of the Nashville group recorded a difference of opinion from the predominant stand on tariff regulations and foreign trade, indicating a strikingly insular point of view; in contrast to the generally accepted position that "the United States should not attempt indefinitely to maintain a domestic price higher than the world price of cotton and that it should bring about a general tariff revision so as to make it possible for foreigners to acquire dollar exchange with which to buy our agricultural exports," some Nashville representatives contended that even if a general measure of tariff reduction were politically possible, it would "largely assist the holders of foreign bonds and industrial exporters without materially increasing the exports of the agricultural South"; in their view "American cotton and tobacco workers should not be thrown into competition with the workers in countries lacking our standards of social security, and for this reason an export subsidy plan should be adopted and an export-import corporation established to earmark dollars exchanged for the benefit of agricultural export. . . ." Nixon did not subscribe to this position.--"Crop Control and Foreign Trade," Report of the Southern Policy Conference, p. 11.

. . . Our economic system is capable of raising the general standard of living if the system is used to capacity, but at present it is not thus being employed because the element of private profit has largely displaced the aim of social use. Until this economic problem is fully confronted, a discussion of the preservation of political democracy is, to a considerable degree, meaningless. An attack on the problem can be made by the formation of producers' and consumers' co-operatives and by government ownership of natural resources, public utilities, including transportation and communication systems, insurance and credit structures, and all industries of a monopolistic nature. Medical and hospital services should also be socialized.¹

Nixon also lobbied in Washington for farm tenant legislation and supported through the Committee, the Bankhead-Jones Act which "provided for staking tenants or potential farmers to land ownership with financing by the Federal government."² He served on the Advisory Board of the New Deal's Farm Security Administration and consultant for its agricultural policies.³ His interest in the Southern labor problem was not confined to farm tenants, however; in July, 1937, as a member of a small committee, he interviewed A. F. of L. and C. I. O. workers at the Republic Steel plant and the new Goodyear Rubber Company at Gadsen, Alabama. Through such interviews the committee on which he served sought to "get findings on abuse of civil rights of union members and organizers by industrialists and their special labor henchmen; . . . we were not vigilantes at Gadsen, we were seeking facts about vigilantes."⁴

Throughout his life Nixon has been concerned with the race problem. Even as a youth in rural Possum Trot, he considered "the Race Question" not in terms of some abstract concept of justice or injustice, of equality or inequality, but in human terms--in concrete situations, on a personal level, with particular Negroes in mind. In his autobiographical Foreword to Lower Piedmont Country Nixon recalls:

My first curiosity about race differences was caused by seeing a copy of a book, The Negro a Beast, which a few young white men were handing around and reading when colored fellows were not in sight. I could not harmonize the book with Alice Lee, a Negro tenant's wife who cooked delicious blackberry pies and let me sample them freely. It was clear to me that she was not a beast. Then there was Charlie Dobbins, a colored farm worker who had a great collection of stories about Buffalo Bill, Frank and Jesse James, and Rube Burrow, a West Alabama outlaw. He could also give vivid accounts of such events as Bob Fitzsimmon's winning the heavyweight championship by knocking out Jim Corbett. He was too good a storyteller to be a beast.⁵

¹"Democratic Institutions," ibid., pp. 8-9.

²Lower Piedmont Country, p. 151.

³Interview, New York, September 12, 1957.

⁴Letter to Virginia Rock, June 22, 1958.

⁵Lower Piedmont Country, p. xvi.

Such an attitude helps to explain Nixon's frustration and his dislike of a police-enforced Jim Crow policy at his sectional meeting for the Southern Conference for Human Welfare.¹ Nixon, who was chairman of the session on farm tenancy, gave a graphic account of the incident:

When we were about two-thirds through the program, the general chairman arrived and called three or four of us to a side room and informed us that 'hell had broken loose.' Police officers were ready with orders to take immediate action if we did not then and there apply racial segregation to the seating of the audience. We stopped the speaker and reshuffled the crowd with the central aisle as the dividing line.²

This was a conference attended by 200 Negroes and 1,000 whites, a "mass effort," said Nixon, "to advance the rights, economic status, and general welfare especially of industrial workers, small farmers and farm tenants, and Negroes."³

Yet Nixon continued his attempts to change the farmers' and Negroes' economic and social second-class citizenship. How fully he has felt this responsibility is suggested in his statement quoted recently by the Virginia Quarterly Review, which published his careful analysis, "The South and Integration: The Political Context": "I have tried to think constructively and realistically on this all-important subject, partly in the light of recent election returns and incidentally in the light of a dearth of forward leadership in Southern politics and education."⁴ That he has been doing so is evident from his letter to the New York Times, February 12, 1956, in which he asserted that continued unequal treatment of the Negro in public education and other public services is made possible by "rotten boroughs" and under-representation of urban people; "urban Negroes," he concluded, "cannot go to the countryside for political justice. The city is their hope of democracy."⁵

Nixon has moved far from a narrowly agrarian, reactionary position: "I did not become a Dixiecrat and I see no good in the spread of White Councils. . . . I cannot go with . . . anti-Negro and anti-Yankee slants . . . I am for constructive acceptance of the inevitable, with a maximum effort for the preservation of human community and community roots."⁶

¹Held at Birmingham, November, 1938, this conference included such distinguished speakers as President Frank Graham of the University of North Carolina, Justice Hugo Black, Senator Claude Pepper, and Mrs. Franklin Roosevelt.

²Lower Piedmont Country, p. 174.

³Ibid., p. 172.

⁴"The Green Room," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXXIII (Autumn, 1957), c.

⁵February 1, 1956, published February 12, Editorial page, "Letters to the Times."

⁶Letter to Virginia Rock, April 22, 1956.

Clearly in his writings and activities through the 1940's and 1950's, Nixon's concern for the individual becomes more and more apparent, whether he is "the poor devil on a one-horse farm," the Southern urban Negro, the "forgotten men of the hills and their children," or a Possum Trot neighbor whose economic status has improved although he has lost much of his "local idiom and local history."¹ Nixon's sense of loss is nostalgically revealed when he wrote in 1946 of his own land--

I always miss something when I go back to my old stamping ground in the hill country. I miss the church in the woods where I was "converted." It was disbanded years ago, and the deserted building burned. I miss the little school house under a big white-oak tree where I got a whipping. A school bus now passes by there to haul pupils four miles away to a consolidated school. I miss an old swimming hole which has been ruined by a paved road and removal of the covering woods. . . .

I miss scenes and characters, but always "I want to go back, and I will." Back to Jacksonville, the neighboring Alabama towns or settlements of Piedmont, Spring Garden, Bald Hornet, Possum Trot, Rabbit-town. I hold with the workman who sang,

If I live and don't get killed,
I'm going back to Jacksonville.²

But he balances this nostalgia with a sharp awareness of the realities and improvements in a South becoming more urbanized and industrial. For Nixon a "constructive acceptance of the inevitable" includes "the eliminating of the poll tax; equitable distribution of educational and welfare funds; decrease . . . in differentials, such as wages, freight, and so on; increase in unionism; widespread farm improvements, improvements in legislation."³ But along with this constructive acceptance of the inevitable, Nixon is convinced, should go a resistance to worship of industrial gods and mere economic progress--a worship which he fears is proceeding to the point where industrial processes become masters instead of slaves, where the art of living is lost in the art of getting a living, where the "articulate spirit of industrialism" is creating "an atmosphere of technological illiteracy."⁴

Perhaps it was the combination of the social scientist and the humanist, concerned about the people and places he knows best, that led John Gould Fletcher to describe Nixon in 1931 as a hard, heavy fighter of the Socialist type which, he said, he always liked. Although he differs

¹Interview, September 12, 1957; "Farewell to 'Possum Trot'?", The Urban South, ed. by Rupert Vance and Nicholas Demerath (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1954), p. 287.

²Lower Piedmont Country, p. xxii.

³Southern Workers Outside the Legislative Pale (New York, 1942), p. 7.

⁴"A Symposium: The Agrarians Today," pp. 29-30.

from some of the Agrarians on significant points (recently Nixon said that "sundry subsequent words and ways of my Agrarian colleagues meet with my disapproval"),¹ he shares with them the same view on "human rootage, community identification, and carrying the kingdom of history within. . . ."² Both his point of view and his modesty are revealed in his characterization of Lower Piedmont Country: "This account is one man's story about people for people."³ Nixon has sought, throughout his long career of teaching, writing, editing, and investigating, to preserve the life of the Possum Trots of America. Still in "the realm of faith" his philosophy continues to view "agrarianism at its best as a Confucian element of balance for civilization at its best."⁴ For him it is "not so much the identity of Possum Trot . . . but the life that counts."⁵

¹"A Thirty Years' Personal View" [paper read at a symposium on the Fugitive-Agrarian Movement, Atlanta, Georgia, November 7, 1959], Mississippi Quarterly, XIII (Spring, 1960), 78.

²Letter to Virginia Rock, July 22, 1958.

³Lower Piedmont Country, p. xi.

⁴"A Thirty Years' Personal View," p. 79.

⁵"Farewell to 'Possum Trot'?", The Urban South, p. 292.

FRANK LAWRENCE OWSLEY (1890-1956)

"The profit of studying history," wrote George Santayana half a century ago, "lies in something else than in a dead knowledge of what happens to have happened."¹ What that "something else" is may be discovered in a study of the career of Frank Owsley, Southern historian of the antebellum and Civil War South. His writing and teaching of history for more than four decades demonstrates that the knowledge he had of "what happens to have happened" was for him anything but "dead." It was, instead, to cite a characterization of how historians necessarily operate, "an allegiance, an act of faith in one kind of future rather than another."²

For Owsley's birthplace and environment, his educational experiences, his friends and his professional activities all conspired to lead him to affirm a set of values which he and others found inhering in Southern agrarianism--values which depended on local autonomy and decentralization, which permitted "art, music, and literature [to] emerge into the sunlight from the dark cramped holes where industrial insecurity and industrial insensitiveness have often driven them."³

Frank Owsley was born in the blackbelt of Montgomery County, Alabama, on January 20, 1890. The son of Lawrence Owsley, a school teacher and later a farmer and cotton buyer, Frank Owsley spent much of his childhood on a farm. His early education was acquired first at a private school taught by a relative on the McGehee estate (his mother was Annie Scott McGehee), later at several country schools where he was allowed to advance as rapidly as he wished, and at a school in the city of Montgomery. His high school and junior college work was obtained at the Fifth District Agricultural School at Wetumpka, Alabama.⁴ Owsley's training as a professional historian began under the provocative teaching of George Petrie at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, from which he received both Bachelor and Master of Science degrees in history in 1911 and 1912 respectively.

His career as a college instructor likewise began at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, where he taught history and Latin for three years after earning his Master's degree. In 1915 he went north to the University of Chicago to study history under Professor William E. Dodd.⁵ There

¹"History," Reason in Science (New York, 1906), p. 53.

²John Herman Randall, Jr. and George Haines, "Controlling Assumptions in the Practice of American Historians," Theory and Practice in Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography, Bulletin 54 (New York, 1946), p. 21.

³"The Pillars of Agrarianism," 547.

⁴Mrs. Frank Owsley, letter to Virginia Rock, June 30, 1958.

⁵Although it is not likely that Professor Dodd was chiefly responsible for Owsley's sectional approach to the study of American history, which he took in all of his later historical research and which became, for him, a "controlling assumption," it can be inferred that Dodd's emphasis on sections was not without influence on Owsley as a graduate student. In

he earned a Master of Arts degree in 1917 and a Doctor of Philosophy in 1924.

In 1920 he married Harriet Chappell.¹ They have had three children: Frances Mildred (dec.), Frank Lawrence, and Margaret Chappell.

Owsley's graduate study was interrupted by service in World War I when he attended the Officers' Training Corps at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, and at Camp Sevier, South Carolina. Immediately after the war he directed an agricultural experimental station at Wetumpka Agricultural School, and for the following two years he taught history again at Alabama Polytechnic Institute and at Birmingham Southern College.

In 1920 he began his twenty-nine-year service at Vanderbilt where he was regarded, according to John Crowe Ransom, as "the best economic Southern historian that we have ever had."² At Vanderbilt he was closely associated with Dean Walter Fleming³ who had selected Owsley to develop a department of history capable of offering a Ph.D. In addition to teaching various "service" courses in history (including Ancient Civilization, Modern Europe and the Great War, and surveys of American history), he developed with various colleagues several advanced sectional history courses and seminars including the Old Southwest, 1763-1816; Slavery, the Confederacy and the Reconstruction; Studies in Civil War History; Sectional Controversies, 1830-1876; and Reconstruction and Later American History.⁴ In 1949 he returned to his native state to become the Hugo

1935 Owsley wrote a review of Frederick Jackson Turner's The United States, 1830-1860. There he recalled that the notes he had taken from Professor Dodd's lectures almost two decades before had dealt minutely with the study of regions and sections, some time before Turner "realized that frontier conditions were transitory while regional and sectional factors were permanent elements and hence of more importance" ("The Historical Philosophy of Frederick Jackson Turner," The American Review, V [Summer, 1935], 371). It has been said of Dodd that "perhaps his greatest contribution to Southern historical scholarship was his inspirational teaching which set the sails of a number of able scholars in the direction of the South and its history" (Wendell H. Stephenson, "A Half Century of Southern Historical Scholarship," Journal of Southern History, XI [February, 1945], 28).

¹Mrs. Owsley has collaborated with her husband in his research and writing. Several articles have been published jointly and since his death, she has been carrying on his work.

²Fugitives' Reunion, p. 201.

³To Dean Fleming, an earlier product of Petrie's "laboratory" in history, I'll Take My Stand was dedicated in "love and admiration." "[To him] some of the contributors," the dedication read, "owe doctrines and example, and all would offer this expression of perfect esteem."

⁴Vanderbilt University Catalogues, 1926-1936.

Friedman Professor of Southern History and head of the department (1951-54) at the University of Alabama. He held this chair until his sudden death in England in October, 1956, while he was on a Fulbright grant to lecture at the University of Cambridge and to complete research on a diplomatic history of the American Civil War.

Because Professor Owsley as a teacher "worked with the passion of the explorer [and] . . . instilled in his students the same spirit"¹--more than fifty young historians have received their doctorate under his direction--perhaps his most lasting influence will come through the stimulation he has given them "to blaze new trails into the unexplored forest of ideas about his region."² Owsley, said his friend and colleague H. C. Nixon, was a gifted teacher "partly because he was never too judicious or too impartial."³

The same quality has appeared in his writings, which he felt might be characterized as Robert E. Lee's defenses were--"offensive defenses." Such was the tone and such the strategy he believed he and the other Agrarians had used in I'll Take My Stand. "We became," he declared at the Fugitive reunion in 1956, "very deliberately provocative. I certainly did, and I have been confronted with it from that time until now by the purists of my profession." A recent book about Southern historians, he recalled on that occasion, labeled him a "modern fire-eater."⁴ And historian Howard K. Beale in 1956, analyzing historians' efforts to explain the coming of the American Civil War, placed Owsley among those who had reverted to the early "devil" theory, an opposition to the general trend of viewing the causes of the Civil War with little sectional partisanship:

. . . As late as 1941 Frank L. Owsley described as the cause of the War "the egocentric, the destructive, the evil, the malignant type of sectionalism" of the North and the "abuse and villification" with which "the moral and intellectual leaders of the North" attacked "slavery and the entire structure of southern society."⁵

Criticism notwithstanding, Owsley, by joining the Agrarians and contributing to the symposium, brought to the movement an historical defense of a "plain-folk" ante-bellum agrarian economy and an analysis of why the conflict was "irrepressible."

It was, in fact, the sectional approach to American history that became one of Owsley's consistent distinctions as an historian--from 1925, when his first major study, States Rights in the Confederacy, was published, to the spring of 1958, when his article "A Southerner's View of

¹"Historical News," American Historical Review, A Quarterly, LXII (January, 1957), 526.

²Thomas D. Clark, Journal of Southern History, XXIII (February, 1957), 144.

³Letter to Virginia Rock, May 14, 1958.

⁴Fugitives' Reunion, p. 205.

⁵"What Historians Have Said About the Causes of the Civil War," Theory and Practice in Historical Study, p. 61. See Owsley's "The

Abraham Lincoln," appeared posthumously.¹ For Owsley the sectional focus permitted him not only to deal with what he believed to be errors in the interpretation of ante-bellum Southern history, but also to defend a region which was "an intimate part of his spiritual being."² The importance of the sectional approach for Owsley's research in Southern history is suggested by a key passage in his article, "The Fundamental Cause of the Civil War: Egocentric Sectionalism":

Our national state was built, not upon the foundations of a homogeneous land and people, but upon geographical sections inhabited severally by provincial, self-conscious, self-righteous, aggressive, and ambitious populations of varying origins and diverse social and economic systems; and the passage of time and the cumulative effects of history have accentuated these sectional patterns.³

Even his concern with the problems of historiography is predicated on an assumption that the sectional approach is valid:

A Southern historian is, I suppose, as objective and impartial as a Northern historian. Every good historian tries to tell the truth. But historians are human, and Northern and Southern they are bound to have emotional reactions to every human situation, no matter how much they try to exercise self-restraint. When emotion is too much in the ascendancy, the historian may be accused of bias, sometimes more elegantly spoken of as a "point of view." Facts are supposed to be facts, but they have a queer way of arranging themselves so that one historian may see them one way, another historian another way. Some facts which seem obscure and dim to one side may shine clear and bright to another. No one sees them all in their true, clear light.⁴

Hence, Owsley held that a sectional allegiance, rather than necessarily causing a biased interpretation of the "what has happened" can result in an analysis that comes closer to the truth. So in his discussion of

Fundamental Causes of the Civil War: Egocentric Sectionalism," Journal of Southern History, VII (February, 1941), 3-18. As an example of evil, malignant sectionalism, Owsley cited and commented on abolitionist propaganda: "One has to seek in the unrestrained and furious invective of the present totalitarians to find a near parallel to the language that the abolitionists and their political fellow travelers used in denouncing the South and its way of life. Indeed, as far as I have been able to ascertain, neither Dr. Goebbels nor Virginio Gayda nor Stalin's propaganda agents have as yet been able to plumb the depths of vulgarity of George Bourne, Stephen Foster, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, and other abolitionists of note" (p. 16).

¹See The Georgia Review, XII (Spring, 1958), 5-17.

²Thomas D. Clark, p. 44.

³Journal of Southern History, VII, 8.

⁴"A Southerner's View of Abraham Lincoln," p. 5.

Abraham Lincoln, Owsley as a Southern historian sought to point out the danger of the "pagan deification" of Abraham Lincoln in the "popular mind of the North, unconsciously inspired by serious scholars who have allowed their emotions and bias to over-emphasize certain elements and to minimize others."¹ The historian who is a Southerner, he concluded, comes closer to "the truth" because he occupies a middle ground. "Lincoln as a peace statesman, assumes great stature, greater, perhaps, to a Southerner than to a Northerner."²

Owsley's historical research has resulted in several books and a number of articles and reviews, impressive not only for their conclusions but also for the originality of the research.³ His first book, States Rights in the Confederacy, his Ph.D. dissertation, "presented a new interpretation of the fundamental weakness of the Confederacy."⁴ King Cotton Diplomacy, prepared during the height of the Agrarian activity, was based on British and French Foreign Office papers, the latter being used for the first time by Owsley. A diplomatic history of the Confederacy was justified, wrote Owsley in the Preface, not only because new material was available, but also because this "new material and new combinations of old material" forced him "to abandon many well-accepted interpretations and draw new conclusions."⁵ His Plain Folk of the Old South, originally presented as the Fleming Lectures at Louisiana State University and published in 1949, was "a classic synthesis of his own work and that of several of his students."⁶ The study presented his original findings about economic and social class structure of the ante-bellum South. The plain folk, concluded Owsley, were neither a "formless mass," nor a "filler that settles into the cracks and crevices left by the planters," nor a "class-conscious group, bitter and resentful because of exploitation and regret." Rather, he declared, they were the rescuers of the South "from complete and, perhaps, final ruin" after the Civil War and Reconstruction, for they succeeded in restoring their farm economy--a vital portion of Southern economy.⁷ As a practicing historian, Owsley has also

¹Ibid., p. 5.

²Ibid., pp. 5, 17.

³Published over three decades, more than a score of articles and some fifty book reviews have appeared in such periodicals as The Journal of Southern History, The American Review, The Southern Review, The Virginia Quarterly Review, The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, The Georgia Review, Yale Review, Hound and Horn, and Annals of the American Academy of Political Science.

⁴"Historical News," p. 526.

⁵Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1931, p. vii. In addition to the British and French Foreign Office papers, Owsley used British journals, British, French, and American newspapers of the Civil War period, letters, memoirs, biographies, diaries, and United States public documents, including diplomatic correspondence with England, France, Russia, and Mexico and consular reports from Mexico, England, Nassau, Bermuda, Havana, British Honduras, and France.

⁶Thomas D. Clark, p. 144.

⁷Plain Folk of the Old South, pp. 133, 137.

collaborated with Oliver P. Chitwood and H. C. Nixon in the writing of a textbook first issued as a two-volume work called A Short History of the American People in 1945, then as a single volume, The United States from Colony to World Power, appearing in 1949.

One of Owsley's distinctions as a historian lay in his methodology which enabled him to correct misconceptions about the ante-bellum South--for instance, that its economic structure was almost completely dependent upon a plantation system, sustained by a widespread system of slavery. Owsley and his wife examined the social and economic structure of the Old South by a detailed analysis of unpublished census schedules and local tax and probate records. The biased accounts of foreign and Northern travelers who provided the impressions for the stereotype of the Old South¹ as an area of just three classes--the rich plantation slaveholder, the poor white, and the Negro--were corrected by a "large body of objective historical material" that Owsley examined, analyzed, and then coded on IBM cards: information from state and federal court records, from textbooks, from the unpublished federal census reports of 1850 and 1860. Careful statistical analyses were made, for instance, of Alabama counties in three types of areas--piney barrens, piedmont, and the blackbelt. A number of other Southern states were examined with the same kind of detailed study and comparison: The conclusion that the late ante-bellum South had a complex social structure of white population with a large middle class, a relatively well-to-do yeoman kind of farmer, might have been startling but appeared irrefutable on the basis of such analysis.²

It was this kind of analysis and statistical study which enabled Owsley as a reviewer, for instance, to question the validity of Roger Shugg's thesis in his Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana. Owsley suggested that Shugg's error in loosely assuming the non-slave holding farmers in Louisiana were landless and thus might be considered a proletariat, was the result in part of inadequate statistical information. Owsley's sectional agrarian interest as well as his solid grounding in facts permitted him to arrive at a carefully measured critique of Shugg's bias:

One would certainly not say that Mr. Shugg has consciously made Procrustean use of his data in order that it might fit the Marxian bed; but one cannot avoid the feeling that the author--despite a book excellent in many respects--has permitted his Marxian assumptions to

¹Owsley's concern as a sectional historian with the source of information about the ante-bellum South's economy and social structure is indicated by this observation: "That we should continue to know the old regime in the South through the eyes of those who traveled fast and saw only from an external point of view, and through the eyes of those who came with an unfriendly mission, must have seemed to all thoughtful students of Southern history to be an act of faith out of keeping with scientific methods and historical criticism" ("The Economic Basis of Society in the Late Ante-Bellum South," Journal of Southern History, VI [February, 1940], 26).

²For a fuller description of the method used, as well as the results, see ibid., 24-45, and "Economic Structure of Rural Tennessee," Journal of Southern History, VII (May, 1942), 161-182.

make him less alert in discovering or using data that would not conform to the theory of the class struggle.¹

Owsley's achievement as a historical scholar and teacher has been recognized by his professional colleagues. From 1934-37 he served as a member of the executive committee of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association; he was on the board of editors of the Journal of Southern History from 1938 to 1941, and in 1940 he was president of the Southern Historical Association. Recognition had also come earlier with a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation grant of a European traveling fellowship in 1927-28 and several grants-in-aid from the Social Science Research Council, enabling him to carry on his research abroad for King Cotton Diplomacy.

As an American, a Southern historian, and an Agrarian, Owsley was much concerned with the growing centralization of government, the loss of economic balance between agrarianism and industrialism, the threat of world communism which he saw invading the South through industrialization,² and the lack of historical perspective which most Americans, he believed, exemplified. The result, observed Owsley, was a failure to learn from past errors:

America makes less use of the past than any civilized country in the world. It might almost be said to be an American cult, this contempt and ignorance of the past. Ceaseless shifting of individuals, the rapid growth of populations, the coming hordes of aliens, the idea of "progress" which scorns things of yesterday, have tended to destroy community life and with it a sense of historical continuity. Without this sense of continuity between past and present, history becomes to a people the advice of a wise father to a wayward and inexperienced youth--the words of a dotard. In America the same mistakes are committed frequently and at close intervals, with no apparent knowledge of former mistakes. . . .³

It was to maintain this sense of continuity between past and present, to analyze mistakes of the past--in short, to become a historian in the most humane sense of the word--that Owsley dedicated his vigorous mind, his extensive knowledge and his human qualities of devotion to a way of life. For Owsley sought to be the kind of historian characterized in the first basic premise of the Social Science Research Council Committee on Historiography: "one of the guardians of the cultural heritage of mankind . . . an interpreter of man's development . . . [who] aims to compose accurate accounts and analyses of selected portions of the past, . . . [who] endeavors to reach generalizations that appear to be valid . . ." and that enable him to seek "credible explanations of the development of

¹"Review of Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana: A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers During Slavery and After, 1840-1875," Journal of Southern History, VI (February, 1940), 117.

²See for instance, "Scottsboro: The Third Crusade," American Review, I (June, 1933), 251-85.

³Ibid., p. 257.

contemporary events, thoughts, manners, and institutions."¹ W. C. Binkley, editor of the Mississippi Valley Historical Review, described Owsley in more personal terms in his Foreword for a revised edition of King Cotton Diplomacy:

Frank Owsley never ceased to be a very human individual. In addition to greatness of mind, he had greatness of spirit, kindness, and conviviality. . . . A colorful personality and lover of vigorous discussion, he was a stimulating influence in any company, and his personal qualities endeared him to a wide circle of friends outside as well as within the realm of scholarship. Possessed of a keen sense of humor, he was a gifted raconteur, with a special fondness for telling tall tales; . . . He had a deep and abiding interest in his students.
 . . .²

One might add to this description that Owsley as a critical historian balanced his concern for scholarship with a remarkable sensitivity to rendering the past through an enlivened poetic imagination, more common in fiction than in history. Writing from an Agrarian perspective, Owsley could be devastating in his scorn for historical interpretations that, in his opinion, have not been adequately grounded on research or that seem unduly biased against Southern views on slavery, the Civil War, or Reconstruction. Arthur Cole's The Irrepressible Conflict he found "an unpleasant shock," something that might be described as a "belated abolition tract," a study seriously limited because of its "material and statistical" conception of culture, biased in its skimming over unpleasant aspects of industrial society, simple-minded in its representation of the causes of the Civil War: "Mr. Cole in this respect ignored Beard, Turner, Dodd, and practically all of the younger generation of American historians. In fact, Mr. Cole seems to have inherited his history rather than to have acquired it,"³ Owsley charged. In explaining the phenomenon of the frontiersmen's choice of land (they had sometimes passed up or failed to seek more promising, fertile land in their moves south and west), Owsley wrote with a perceptive rendering of intangibles:

The fact that the emigrant shakes from his feet the dust of his old community does not mean that he divests himself of the mental picture and love of the old countryside, of those rich limestone valleys, rolling hills, and sandy levels where the odor of the resinous pine scents the air and the tall trees moan in the wind, or the rugged mountains with purple shadows and smoke hanging above the cove in the late afternoon, announcing the cheery news of supper a-cooking or the still making a run. A settler simply could never be entirely happy and at home unless he was surrounded by a landscape much like the one where he had spent his earlier years.⁴

¹"Propositions," Theory and Practice in Historical Study: A Report of the Committee on Historiography, p. 134.

²(Chicago, 1959), p. xiv.

³"The War of the Sections," Virginia Quarterly Review, X (October, 1934), 632-635.

⁴"The Pattern of Migration and Settlement on the Southern Frontier," Journal of Southern History, XI (May, 1945), 165.

If, as Allen Nevins has said, history should give us pleasure, if the best historians are admirable storytellers, if one of their objects is to make historical writing more artistic,¹ then Frank Owsley has been justifiably admired as an historian. But even more he has been valued for "his sincerity and vigor," for his originality and his "rich human qualities."²

¹"Introduction," The World of History (New York, 1953), [p. 7].

²Thomas Clark, p. 144.

Late in 1923 when John Crowe Ransom wrote to Allen Tate about Eliot and The Wasteland, he gave expression to certain views about art and the nature of poetry, views which proved to be representative not only of his critical theory but also of his poetic practice. The two had been waging a friendly debate (both public and private) over the literary merits of T. S. Eliot's juxtaposition of ironic attitudes, the tradition of English poetry, and other closely associated matters.¹ To Tate Ransom wrote:

The art-thing sounds like the first immediate transcript of reality, but it isn't; it's a long way from the event. It isn't the raw stuff of experience. The passion in it has mellowed down--emotion recollected in TRANQUILLITY, Above all things else, the core of experience in the record has been taken up into the same total of things and its relations there discovered are given in the work of art. That is why the marginal meanings, the associations, the interlinear element of a poet are all-important. . . . There must not be a trace of the expository philosophical method, but nevertheless the substance of the philosophical conclusions must be there for the intelligent reader. The artist can't . . . be the impartial spectator, the colorless medium of information, the carrier of a perfectly undirected passion, I can't help believing more and more (it must be the trace that the classical pedagogy has left on me) that the work of art must be perfectly serious, ripe, mature--full of heart, but with enough head to govern heart.²

Ransom's characterization of a work of art is, in essence, although unintentionally, a self-characterization. As poet, as critic, as a humane being, he has been serious, "mature: full of heart, but with enough head to govern heart." For his canon of work and his influence as a teacher--both of which embody the values he esteems in his culture--represent perfectly that rare combination of passion and rationality, of emotion and intelligence, of integrity and decorum.

On the occasion of his sixtieth birthday in 1948, when he was honored in a special issue of the Sewanee Review, Ransom was described by Tate as "the master," undogmatic, courteous, a classically educated intelligence, "unremitting in the zeal and integrity with which he has explored the possibilities of an Aristotelian criticism of the poetic disorder of our age, one of the "first poets, in any language."³

The dicta Ransom set forth in commenting on Eliot are perfectly embodied in his "Old Mansion," first published in 1924. While the poem involves Ransom as an artist in the substance of a philosophical conclusion,

¹See Louise Cowan's summary of the controversy, The Fugitive Group, pp. 122-125.

²Letter, December 17 [1923].

³[Editor's note], "Homage to John Crowe Ransom," Sewanee Review, LVI (Summer, 1948), [p. 366].

it avoids the expository philosophical method. It reveals a core of experience and at the same time implies the poet's attitude toward the world of his past and present. The "I" of "Old Mansion" is a new generation Southerner, "an intruder" smoking his cigar who--"in the token" of retreating from decaying "towers, white monoliths," and "ivied walls," (having been turned away from the manor)--

. . . went, with courage shaken
To dip, alas, into some unseemlier world.¹

A partial symbolic representation of Ransom's views, tinged with irony--for "ambiguity of attitude is a part of the style and structure"² of Ransom's poetry--"Old Mansion" figures the reluctant recognition of the loss and insecurity a modern native Southerner must live with. Such an inference results from a study of Ransom's activities and writings since his Fugitive and Agrarian days. Against an affirmation of traditional values, Ransom has dipped into "some unseemlier world"--a world of mass production and mass consumption, of mass education, of an increasing centralization of government, of an industrialized society tending more and more toward abstractness and the dissociation of man's aesthetic-religious sensibilities.

Born in Pulaski, Tennessee, April 30, 1888,³ Ransom was shaped by a family heritage and early life not unlike those of several fellow Agrarians. Although not of the landed or planter class, his family were people of learning. His father, Dr. John Ransom, was a Methodist preacher with a reputation as a linguist and theologian. In his calling as a missionary in the South, Dr. Ransom necessarily moved about a good deal so that his son John attended many schools and often was unable to finish a year in a school where he had started. His elementary education was acquired in part by wide reading, in part by attending a private preparatory institution in Nashville--Bowen School--where he studied Latin and Greek. It was a secular education "in the best tradition of humane learning derived from a coherent view of life."⁴

At the age of fifteen Ransom entered Vanderbilt University, completed his Bachelor of Arts degree six years later, in 1909, after which he

¹Poems and Essays, p. 37.

²Donald A. Stauffer, "Portrait of the Critic-Poet as Equilibrist," Sewanee Review, LVI, p. 432.

³A former student, friend and fellow Agrarian, Andrew Lytle observed that the place and particular time of Ransom's birth were important: "Tennessee was a part of the Old West. It had been laid waste by Civil War; but because its tradition was old enough to have roots and because it was general farming country--particularly stock farming which requires greater humanity than specialized planting--and again because Tennessee was a border state and returned quickly to the Union, it missed the extreme waste of Reconstruction and was able to resume fairly quickly a pattern of life."--"Note on a Traditional Sensibility," ibid., p. 371.

⁴Ibid.

won a Rhodes scholarship. His undergraduate studies were interrupted in his sophomore year with his acceptance of a teaching position in Mississippi. At Oxford from 1910 to 1913 he read the "Greats"--classical literature, history in Latin and Greek, and philosophy (Plato and Aristotle in particular).¹ In 1913 he was granted a Bachelor of Arts in Litterae Humaniores from Christ Church College.

Ransom was married to Robb Reavill in 1920. They have had three children, a daughter Helen Elizabeth, and two sons, David Reaville and John James.

Except for a year spent teaching Latin at Hotchkiss School, a boys' academy in Litchfield, Connecticut, and for summer school teaching appointments, Ransom has devoted the major part of his teaching career to two institutions: twenty-three years at Vanderbilt University (from 1914 to 1937²) and twenty-one years as Carnegie Professor of Poetry (1937 to 1958) at Kenyon College, a position from which he retired in June, 1958. Special lectureships and summer teaching have taken him to Colorado State Teachers' College, Peabody College for Teachers, the Universities of New Mexico, Kentucky, Texas, Chattanooga, and Florida, the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, Western Tennessee Teacher's College, the Breadloaf School of English, Harvard, Indiana University's School of Letters, and since his retirement Northwestern University.³

To attempt to summarize his influence as a teacher would be presumptuous; even his most distinguished students and closest friends have limited their observations to generalities. But one can say that Ransom, over more than four decades of teaching, has moved his students to notable creative achievements--as teachers, writers, and simply as human beings. And it was of this indefinable, unique quality--the essence of Ransom's character--that his students spoke obliquely when they paid homage to their mentor. On the occasion of Ransom's sixtieth birthday in 1948, Andrew Lytle acknowledged:

It is very hard to pin down the extent of his influence, because so much of it lies in the personal interchanges between him and a continuous stream of students. But it seems to me that one fact is of great importance; his relationships depend upon a sensibility that functions always in the same way.⁴

¹The influence of Kant and Hegel was particularly strong while Ransom was at Oxford. Their philosophy is reflected in his criticism and theory of aesthetics.

²Ransom's teaching at Vanderbilt was interrupted by two years of World War I service as first lieutenant in the Field Artillery and instructor at the Saumur Artillery School in France.

³He has taught a variety of interesting courses in the field of belles lettres. In the summer of 1958, for example, he offered at the Indiana School of Letters a seminar in "English Poetry: A Study of the quasi-religious and social purposes in the making of poetry."

⁴"A Note on a Traditional Sensibility," pp. 370-71.

As a friend and student, Allen Tate observed:

To us who have been moved, two paramount virtues appear. The unbroken affection which has sustained our friendship with John Ransom since we sat under him at Vanderbilt University, nearly thirty years ago, would not have lasted had he not, gently and always implicitly referred our young aberrations of mind and manners to an order of courtesy above us all.¹

And Robert Lowell, winner of a Pulitzer Prize for poetry and Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress in 1948, spoke at some length of Ransom's influence as a teacher:

. . . No other American English teacher has had as many talented students. In the last thirty years Allen Tate, Andrew Lytle, R. P. Warren, Cleanth Brooks, Randall Jarrell, and Peter Taylor have studied under him. Among them are several of the country's best teachers; several of its best writers. That many, or any, writers should come from the Thracian Athens of Vanderbilt University and the declension of Tennessee, was surprising; but, perhaps, their being with Ransom was an irrelevant accident. And yet, I think the teacher may have made the difference--a hard one to put one's finger on. It was not the classes, but the conversations that mattered. We used to endlessly memorize and repeat and mimic Ransom sentences. We learned something from that. Somehow one left him with something inside us moving toward articulation, logic, directness and complexity--one's intuitions were more adroit and tougher, after one had contemplated the stamina and wit that his writings had required of him. So much for imitation. . . . Fortunately, it was not possible to become a replica. One took what one could, and went on, God willing, as one's self.²

Recognition also came for his contribution to letters. Ransom has received a variety of awards for his poetry and criticism: the Southern Prize of the Poetry Society of South Carolina in 1923 for "Armageddon," a Guggenheim fellowship to England for creative writing in 1931-32, the Bollingen Prize for Poetry and the Russell Loines Memorial Fund Prize from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, both in 1951.

The quantity of Ransom's poems is small; their quality is distinguished. That he has not published a book of new poems in more than three decades has sometimes been deplored, F. O. Matthiessen has observed, as evidence of "his lack of capacity for growth," or of the crippling effect of "cultural circumstances of our time."³ But the four slim volumes of poems⁴ and the two collections, which represent the production of only

¹[Editor's Note], "Homage to John Crowe Ransom," [p. 366].

²"John Ransom's Conversation," ibid., p. 375.

³"Primarily Language," ibid., p. 392.

⁴Many of the poems were published in the 1920's and a few appeared in the 1930's for the first time in such periodicals as the Sewanee Review, The Literary Digest, Harper's, Saturday Review of Literature, the New Republic, the Atlantic Monthly, and Poetry.

about fifteen years of his life, contain verse which Cleanth Brooks predicts "will increasingly come to be regarded as the truly distinguished poetry of the Twentieth Century."¹

The first volume, Poems about God (1919), Ransom himself apparently found unrepresentative of his later, mature style: at any rate, he chose none of these for his Selected Poems, (1945), or for the Vintage collection, Poems and Essays (1955). Randall Jarrell has described these early efforts as "old-fashioned, amateurishly direct jobs . . .," on first reading "almost impossibly different from [his] later poetry," though, by the end of the volume, "one has wound up among the later poems."² Chills and Fever, Ransom's second collection, published in 1924, prompted a critic for The Bookman to write: "His lyrical sophistication, his whimsical agility in thought and words give him the power to say the almost unsayable and to suggest accurately what cannot be said."³ With an enthusiastic introduction by the English poet Robert Graves, the third volume of Ransom's poems, Grace after Meat, was published in London in the same year as Chills and Fever.⁴ His last collection, Two Gentlemen in Bonds, issued in 1927, contains some of his most distinctive and distinguished poems, including "Janet Waking," "Antique Harvesters," "Man without Sense of Direction," and "The Equilibrists." Although only five of its poems are new, Selected Poems is no mere collection of Ransom's earlier work; rather, with his rigorous selectivity and careful revisions, this volume reveals an artistic integrity, a sensitivity and control that represent an impeccable poetic taste.⁵ In an overall estimate of Ransom's poetry, F. O. Matthiessen observed: "[He] has not been deluded into the anxious striving to be a poet for the career's sake. . . . He has not attempted to live up to any extraneous expectations, nor watered down his accomplishments by diluted sequels. He has produced some of the best minor poems in our language."⁶

Since the late 1930's Ransom's influence has emanated mainly from his activities and writing in literary criticism. Three collections of his essays have been published and for almost two decades he has edited the Kenyon Review, which he founded in 1939. (He retired from this position in 1959, a year after he ended his teaching at Kenyon College.) The

¹"The Doric Delicacy," Sewanee Review, LVI (Summer, 1948), 415.

²"John Ransom's Poetry," ibid., 385 ff.

³Bernice L. Kenyon, The Bookman, LX (November, 1924), 346.

⁴Issued by the Hogarth Press on the solicitation of Graves and T. S. Eliot, this volume contains nine selections from Poems about God, ten from Chills and Fever, and one new poem, "Ilex Priscus."

At least one poem was included solely because Graves insisted; Ransom would have preferred to omit it, Graves admitted, because he had "grown out of liking [it] on the grounds of its hastiness and ugliness."-- "Introduction," Grace after Meat (London, 1924), p. 8. Ransom's judgment was sounder than Graves'.

⁵For a discussion of Ransom's revisions see Donald A. Stauffer, "Portrait of the Critic-Poet as Equilibrist," pp. 429-431.

⁶"Primarily Language," ibid., p. 401.

Kenyon Review, one of America's most distinguished literary journals, has been described as reflecting "the scholarliness and distinction of [Ransom's] own mind."¹ The World's Body (1938), Ransom's first collection of critical essays, not only contains "practical" criticism--analyses of particular works such as Milton's Lycidas, Shakespeare's sonnets, Millay's The Return, and Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral--but also attempts to offer "a fairly single and coherent poetic doctrine," to establish foundations for literary criticism by discussing the nature of poetry and the function of criticism. For Ransom, poetry is a kind of knowledge, as objective and true and "real" as "the world's body," which it seeks to reveal in all its "untechnical homely fulness."² The book's immediate effect, a scholar has noted, "was to provoke discussion of aesthetic problems in critical magazines on an unprecedented scale."³ Along with the neo-Aristotelian "critical revolution" at the University of Chicago, and with Brooks and Warren's Understanding Poetry as a practical guide, "Ransom's book invaded university classrooms to pave the way for a decade of ontologically minded 'new critics.'"⁴ Three years after the appearance of The World's Body, Ransom's second collection, The New Criticism was published. The title was soon utilized to describe the loosely related critical views whose only common denominator, according to Robert Penn Warren, was "a willingness to look long and hard at the literary object."⁵ The third volume containing essays was less comprehensive: Poems and Essays, the Vintage edition published in 1955, includes some of Ransom's more recent observations on the relation of poetry and the artist to the worlds of criticism, politics, and aesthetics.

Although he has devoted most of his time and thought to teaching, and to the writing of poetry and criticism, Ransom's interests had long before 1955, extended to religious, economic, and social matters. Drawing on his Protestant heritage and his allegiance to agrarianism, he attempted in God without Thunder, An Unorthodox Defense of Orthodoxy--published shortly before I'll Take My Stand,--as the "son of a theologian and the grandson of another one" to present to "novices" like himself the need for an orthodox religion as a means of combatting "scientism." In his introduction, written in the form of a letter, Ransom observed:

¹Stanley Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors, p. 1147.

²John Crowe Ransom, "Preface," The World's Body (New York, 1938), p. xi.

³John Bradbury, The Fugitives: A Critical Account, p. 134.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Warren maintains that there was neither a "new" criticism nor a new development of an old one. His comments are refreshing. Naming I. A. Richards, Eliot, Tate, Blackmur, Winters, Brooks, and Leavis as those generally considered "new critics," he asks: "How in God's name can you get that gang into the same bed? There's no bed big enough and no blanket that would stay tucked. When Ransom wrote his book called the New Criticism he was pointing out the vindictive variety among the critics and saying that he didn't agree with any of them. The term is, in one sense, a term without any referents."--"The Art of Fiction," pp. 131, 132.

What a sorry reputation the true priests, the devout keepers of the myths, enjoy in this Western world, and particularly in this most Western world of America! It has occurred to me therefore that I might undertake to explain it, as if in simple untechnical monosyllables the function of the myths in human civilization. This seems to me an important thing to do; and going with it is the task of explaining why one myth may be better than another.¹

Hence Ransom pleaded,

With whatever religious institution a man may be connected, let him try to turn it back towards orthodoxy. Let him insist on a virile and concrete God, and accept no Principle as a substitute. Let him restore to God the thunder.²

This concern with non-literary matters--which Ransom nevertheless consistently linked to his involvement with aesthetics--continued through the mid-thirties, when he published such essays as "Land!," "The State and the Land," "Happy Farmers," "Trading Culture for War Debts," "A Capital for the New Deal," "Sociology and the Black Belt," and "Shall We Complete the Trade? A Proposal for the Settlement of Foreign Debts to the United States."

To attempt here, in a brief biographical sketch, a fuller description of Ransom's poetry and his techniques, or his views and assumptions as a literary critic, or his convictions as an artist functioning in a technological society would result only in a misleading representation of the poet-critic's ideas. Suffice it to suggest that Ransom has not remained a static thinker--neither in literary considerations, nor in matters sociological or political--as his observations at the Fugitives' reunion in 1956 disclose. However, certain of his ideas about the life of the spirit have remained truths for him. While he now believes we need not necessarily despair over the new culture which faces us, only humanism as a way of life will save us. That this new culture, based on mass consumption, is creating a new economy on which we can have no effect, he admits. Nevertheless, he believes, "it's very healthy that we are starting all over here in this country."³ "Mass production, which is a new cultural force in the world," does not, he has suggested, prevent that cultural minority who wish to do so from practising a humanistic mode of life, or from "taking their art and literature and living culturally, after the ancient European tradition which was founded upon the land."⁴ The broadening of the cultural base should be continued, Ransom believes, since it is to the interest of businessmen to redistribute the economic wealth. From such a redistribution, as the economic conditions of Negroes are bettered, an

¹God Without Thunder, p. x.

²Ibid.

³Fugitives' Reunion, p. 193.

⁴Interview, September 25, 1957, Gambier, Ohio; and "Five Questions," Shenandoah, III (Summer, 1952), 16.

improvement in race relations may result. Obviously a redistribution of wealth will also create new problems, he would agree, but it will help to democratize education, an effect not necessarily undesirable. It is impossible to be close to education, he has said, and not see that some of the best boys one gets often come from the other side of the tracks.¹

The most distinctive aspect of his thought and style as poet, literary critic, or commentator on society is his manner of using the concrete: it is reflected in his admirable precision of diction, whether archaic, Latinized, colloquial or elegant; it enables him to represent dualisms, to be consistently and effectively ironic, and to transcend irony by balancing in fine juxtaposition, a sympathetic acceptance of human limitations with a gentle, wry, probing questioning. The London Times Literary Supplement described this quality--the embodiment of complexities in the concrete--as "no where so much respected, so well understood," as in the South: "the details which make the object 'precious,' (to use John Crowe Ransom's word) . . ."² are superbly rendered.

Modest, of courtly dignity, sympathetic and reserved, Ransom reflects in his writing the distinguishing characteristics of a civilized man and a modern poet: courtesy, respect for the individual, recognition of society's complexities and ambiguities, "belief in the necessity of ritual," and "proper respect for the facts of life and a determination to triumph over them whenever possible."³ Of him, Donald A. Stauffer wrote, "There is something central and unassuming in the gentleman from Ohio. It is not the location that matters, it is the gentleman."⁴

How far Ransom has moved into "some unseemlier world" (unseemlier at least from the original Agrarian point of view) is suggested by the tone and the implications of two observations he has made in the course of his career, one as long ago as 1929, the other in 1953:

. . . Religion is the only effective defense against Progress and our very vicious economic system, against empire and socialism, or any other political foolishness. It is our only guarantee of security and--an item that seems to me to carry a good deal of persuasive power--the enjoyment of life.⁵

. . . There should be a good deal of interest in Mr. [Russell] Kirk's theologism and humanism,⁶ but the only practical attitude he expresses

¹Interview, September 25, 1957.

²"The Southern Revival--A Land and Its Interpreters," September 17, 1954, p. xvi.

³Isabel Gamble, "Ceremonies of Bravery: John Crowe Ransom," Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South, ed. by Louis Rubin, Jr. and Robert Jacobs (Baltimore, 1953), pp. 341, 350.

⁴"Portrait of the Critic-Poet as Equilibrist," p. 426.

⁵Letter to Allen Tate, July 4, 1929.

⁶Ransom was reviewing Russell Kirk's The Conservative Mind in the Kenyon Review.

toward the leviathan of modern business is a dull hatred. This is not statesmanlike, and in fact it is simply not possible as the attitude of a political party that means to take part in public affairs. There is no grappling, so far as he is concerned, with the economic responsibilities which a government has to undertake nowadays even if it is a conservative government.¹

A study of Ransom is fittingly concluded with a comment by Donald Stauffer: "The focus on Mr. Ransom as a conservator does not imply that he stands still. He moves gracefully, but not until he knows where he is going."²

¹"Empirics in Politics," Poems and Essays, p. 136.

²"Portrait of the Critic-Poet as Equilibrist," p. 427.

In 1932, at the height of the Agrarians' battle against industrialism, Allen Tate published an essay about Emily Dickinson and her "poetry of ideas." There--long before the days of new criticism or his conversion to Catholicism--Tate set forth a point of view which, in retrospect, seems to be prophetic of his lifelong "pilgrimage in the quest for certainty"¹ and of his development as a poet and critic. Emily Dickinson's verse, he wrote,

. . . appeared in an age unfavorable to the use of intelligence in poetry. . . . It is a poetry of ideas, and it demands of the reader a point of view--not an opinion of the New Deal or of the League of Nations, but an ingrained philosophy that is fundamental, a settled attitude that is almost extinct in this eclectic age. . . . I am not upholding . . . the so-called dead hand of tradition, but rather a rational insight into the meaning of the present in terms of some imaginable past implicit in our own lives: we need a body of ideas that can bear upon the course of the spirit and yet remain coherent as a rational instrument.²

Tate's career and achievements as a writer reveal that his "rational insight into the meaning of the present" has come in terms of a past which was both implicit and explicit in his life; for him a coherent body of ideas exists which have borne upon the "course of [his] spirit" while serving him as a "rational instrument."

From his heritage as a Southerner, from his study of ancient, medieval, and modern literature, from his search into the nature of the human condition, Tate has derived a body of ideas that constitute for him a "settled attitude," a fundamental philosophy which enables him to evaluate a mechanistic, modern society against an organic, traditional culture.

Born in Winchester, Clarke County, Kentucky, in 1899, Allen Tate belonged to a family whose history was "an epitome of all that's happened to the South" and to himself spiritually.³ Both his father's and mother's families were Southerners: his father, a lumberman, was brought up in Jefferson County, Kentucky, on a farm; his mother's family were residents of Fairfax County, Virginia. Tate's early education was acquired first at home, then at a private school in Louisville. Even as a child he seemed to prefer the life of the mind. He recalls,

When I was about twelve my mother said to me one day, "Put that book down and go out and play. You mustn't strain your mind; it isn't

¹Richard Foster, "Narcissus as Pilgrim: Allen Tate," Accent XVII, 3 (Summer, 1957), 158.

²"Emily Dickinson," The Man of Letters in the Modern World, Selected Essays: 1928-1955 (New York, Meridian Books, 1955), p. 211. Tate has indicated that this essay, dated 1932, had been written four years earlier.

³Donald Davidson's paraphrase of a comment by Tate, in a letter to Tate, April 14, 1931.

very strong. (As a boy of four or five I had a big bulging head; my elders, who discussed children in those days as if they were inanimate objects, used to say, "Do you think he has water on the brain?") The family belief that I was an imbecile redoubled my secret efforts to prove them wrong: secret efforts because outwardly until I was through college I was trying to appear just like other boys--a rôle in which I was not successful.¹

His private school education was continued at Georgetown Preparatory School which he attended the year before his enrolment at Vanderbilt University in 1918. There his study and particularly his extra-curricular activities confirmed him in his dedication to the world of letters. Absorbed by his study of Sanskrit and Greek and by philosophy courses taught by Professors Herbert Sanborn and Herbert Tolman,² excited by discussions of literature, philosophy and the reading of original poetry at the Fugitive meetings, Tate in his four years at Vanderbilt formed close friendships with Ransom, Davidson, and several other Fugitives while he continued to write poetry and served as an editor of The Fugitive. His graduation with a Bachelor of Arts degree, magna cum laude, in 1922 posed for him the problem of earning a living. In spite of his horror of going into the business world,³ Tate tried working in his brother's coal company in Eastern Kentucky, but, he said, "my business career was over" after "I lost the company seven hundred dollars in one day by shipping some coal to Duluth that should have gone to Cleveland."⁴

For a short time Tate taught Latin and English in a West Virginia high school, but his ambition was to live and write in New York, and to that end he devoted nine hours or more a day, reading a great variety of literature and writing poetry and essays. By the fall of 1924 he was able to leave the South. He was married in November.⁵ Shortly after his arrival in New York he found a position with the Climax Publishing Corporation, a firm issuing pulp magazines such as Ranch Romances and Telling Tales for which Tate, an associate editor, read manuscripts and prepared copy for the printer. At the same time he was free-lancing, turning out book reviews, writing poetry and criticism, which appeared in the Nashville Tennessean,

¹Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, Twentieth Century Authors (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1942), p. 1385.

²In 1926 Tate contributed a poem to a memorial volume for Professor Tolman. The last stanza represents something of his admiration for his professor of Greek:

I should have missed an attitude
Of mercy, and a fine mood
Without this happy gentleman
I, the young barbarian!

--In Memoriam (Nashville, 1926), p. 73.

³Recalled at the Fugitive Reunion, held at Vanderbilt University, May 3, 1956.

⁴Twentieth Century Authors, p. 1385.

⁵Tate's first wife was Caroline Gordon, a distinguished writer of fiction. They were divorced in 1959. Tate's second wife, whom he married in the summer of 1959, is the poet, Isabella Gardner.

The Herald-Tribune, the Nation and such literary journals as Hound and Horn, the Bookman, Poetry, and the Saturday Review of Literature. Perhaps it was this difficult period in New York as well as other experiences later that led him to observe recently: "It was always necessary to move on, in intervals between essays, and to think about something else, such as a room where one might write them and whether the rent could be paid."¹ At any rate, the Tates lived in and around New York for a period of four years.

During this time he came to know and to form friendships with a number of writers, some of whom acquainted him with the avante garde. Malcolm Cowley, Kenneth Burke, Slater Brown, E. E. Cummings, Edmund Wilson, Stark Young, Gerhart Munson, and John Wheelwright were among his associates during the mid-twenties. With Hart Crane² (whom he first met in New York in 1924 after a two-year correspondence), Tate and Crane's other close friends often discussed at length such questions as the poet's relation to society, the nature of art, and the character of social values. Tate, who has suggested that Crane was living in these friendships "the life of the mind and imagination,"³ apparently found these discussions and friendships stimulating, judging from his writing of this New York period.

The award of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1928--the same year in which were published his first volume of poetry, Mr. Pope and Other Poems, and his first biography, Stonewall Jackson: The Good Soldier--enabled Tate to leave for France with his wife and daughter, Nancy Meriwether. There he wrote his second biography, also on a Southern Civil War figure, Jefferson Davis: His Rise and Fall,⁴ and a number of poems which later appeared in

¹"Preface," The Man of Letters in the Modern World, p. 6.

²Tate writes of Crane -- "a man whom I knew affectionately for ten years as a friend" in his essay "Hart Crane," The Man of Letters . . . , p. 285.

³"Crane: The Poet as Hero," ibid., p. 297.

⁴This biography was enthusiastically hailed by several of Tate's future fellow Agrarians as well as by professional historians and other critics. Most frequently commended were his handling of the historical material and his style. Davidson, for instance, wrote Tate in a letter: "Owsley told me that he was simply amazed. He knew that you had not done the long meticulous reading that 'trained' historians usually do; how then had you, almost by intuition, seized just the right things, seen through problems, struck just the right answer? I told him that was the effect of real critical intelligence plus poetic sense at work; you simply didn't have to be as dull as the regular historians in order to be as right as they--in fact, you could beat them any time because you didn't have your nose in the molehills, yet didn't overlook the molehills, either" (October 26, 1929).

Warren, who had finished his John Brown, wrote Tate from Oxford: "I am much impressed. I read it all over again, and I feel that your early pessimism was certainly without any foundation. It is much better than Jackson from every point of view . . . and especially in the mere writing. And may I say that I think the last section is remarkably done. There is a concentration and climax which is so easily done, that I didn't see how

his second volume of poetry, Poems: 1928-1932. For Tate his stay abroad was "immensely valuable"; his two years away from the United States after a four-year absence from the South gave him a new appreciation for his Southern heritage and led him, he said, to perceive parallels between the past and the present, between Europe and America.¹

The Tates returned to the United States early in 1930 and moved to a three-hundred acre farm (which they called Benfolly) near Clarksville, Tennessee. Here Ransom, Davidson and their other friends in Nashville gathered to discuss plans for the symposium on the South and agrarianism. During the sixteen years the farm was maintained,² Tate contributed poetry, two short stories (his first venture into fiction), and a novel, The Fathers,³ literary criticism, book reviews, and polemical pieces to most of the prominent journals and little magazines of the United States.⁴

The experience he had gained in editing The Fugitive during the early twenties was useful for other editorial posts: he was Southern editor for Hound and Horn from 1931 to 1934 and editor of The Sewanee Review for three years (1944-47).⁵ But he has not confined himself to the editing of literary journals. An impressive list of edited volumes has appeared under his name: with Herbert Agar as co-editor, Tate continued his fight against industrialism through a collection of agrarian-distributist essays entitled, Who Owns America?: A New Declaration of Independence (1936); three volumes appeared in 1942--The Language of Poetry, Princeton Verse Between Two Wars, and American Harvest, edited with John Peale Bishop. Five years later, as a memorial to Bishop, who had died in 1944, Tate issued A Southern Vanguard, a collection of critical essays, poetry, and stories on

until it was all over. Honestly, I like it immensely" (December, 1929).

And Henry Steele Commager, reviewing the biography for the book section of the New York Herald Tribune, paid a high compliment to someone outside the guild: "It is a study that must excite the admiration and wonder of the more professional historian. There is about it an extraordinary freshness, a veracity, a sureness that none of the other biographies of Davis, with the exception of William E. Dodd, have" (September 29, 1929, p. 26).

¹Interview, April 23, 1957.

²Except for another year abroad (1932)--Miss Gordon had won a Guggenheim Fellowship--the Tates lived during most of the thirties at Benfolly which they sold in 1946.

³Published in 1938 at the end of the Agrarian movement, The Fathers, a fictionalized study of his own family background, was named by the British journal Scrutiny as one of America's best novels published between the two wars. In the spring of 1960 it was republished in London where it has had considerable success.

⁴In addition to the periodicals named above, Tate's work appeared during these years in the Virginia Quarterly Review, The Yale Review, The New Republic, the Southern Review, and The American Review.

⁵Tate has maintained an editorial connection with the Sewanee Review by serving as an advisory editor from 1953 to the present; he was also an advisory editor for the Kenyon Review from 1938 to 1942.

Southern subjects or by Southern writers. In 1951, with his first wife Caroline Gordon, Tate published The House of Fiction, distinguished not only by a fine selection of stories and novelettes but also by perceptive critical analyses.¹ One of his latest edited volumes, appearing in the fall of 1958, is a collection of recent British and American poetry, edited with Lord David Cecil.

Extensive as Tate's editing has been, it should probably be considered only a secondary interest. His activities as teacher, literary critic, and poet--all carried on simultaneously--manifest his concern with the place of the man of letters in modern culture. Institutions at which he has taught and positions include lectureships at Southwestern College (Memphis, 1934-36) and Columbia University (summer, 1936), Professor of English at the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina (1938-39), Resident Fellow in Writing, the Creative Arts Program at Princeton University (1939-42), lecturer in English at New York University (1947-51), visiting professor of humanities at the University of Chicago (1949), and Professor of English at the University of Minnesota since 1951.² During summers he has been at Harvard University and Brandeis. In 1948 the University of Louisville awarded him an honorary Doctor of Letters. Recognition has also come from abroad: he has lectured at the Sorbonne, the University of Turin, Liège, and Louvain, and has taught as a Fulbright Professor at Oxford University in 1953 and at the University of Rome in 1953-54.

Tate's teaching has been described by students as "creative"--because he "stirs the imagination and stimulates students to an impulse to respond, but at the same time, subtly cuts off the conventional or obvious modes of response."³ Perhaps this results not solely from his personality--described as "decorous" and wittily formal--but also from a view he holds about education: "I simply assume that [my students] are intelligent, mature people and I address them as such. I don't bother with dullards."⁴ In an interview with Lyman Bryson, moderator of a series of programs on "The Creative Mind and Method," Tate gave insight into his own views and techniques of teaching writing courses when he observed: ". . . the virtue of that kind of teaching is simply that a gifted poet might be saved a little time by having some older person talk to him about what he is doing or to encourage him, or perhaps to tell him to stop writing poetry and go into the oil business or something of that sort. You can't teach it."⁵ His effectiveness as a teacher was recognized nationally as early as 1940

¹Tate wrote three of the critical analyses in House of Fiction: on Joyce's "The Dead," Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," and James' "The Real Thing."

²Among the institutions to which he has been invited for special lectures are Illinois, Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Vassar, Smith, Johns Hopkins, Bowdoin, Wisconsin, California, Pomona, Oregon, and Washington.

³Doris Taft Hedlund, "A Tribute to Allen Tate: Poet--Professor," The Minnesota Daily Ivory Tower, May 12, 1958, p. 15.

⁴Ibid.

⁵The Creative Mind . . . and Method, WGBH-FM (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1958), p. 19.

when he was asked by Stringfellow Barr to be a weekly panel member of CBS's "Invitation to Learning": "I felt the program needed an articulate, imaginative poetic person,"¹ Barr said. Tate's comments on a more than a score of classics were provocative and perceptive.² For him the ultimate purpose of education has become not only to halt the "specter of Cultural Decay" but to discover truth: "Unless we can create and develop a hierarchy of studies that can lead not merely to further studies but to truth, one may doubt that the accelerating decline of modern culture will be checked."³

But Tate is better known publicly as a critic than as a teacher. In 1928 ~~W~~vor Winters described him as "the only critic worth reading in the United States"; in 1958 John Bradbury concluded that Tate "has, like no other American critic of his time, compelled attention."⁴ His scores of essays which have been published over a period of three decades have been collected in six volumes of criticism.⁵ Here Tate as critic exemplifies his view that "the act of criticism is analogous to the peripety of tragedy; it is a crisis of recognition always, and at times also of reversal, in which the whole person is involved. The literary critic is committed, like everyone else, to a particular stance, at a moment in time; . . ."⁶ Tate's criticism is a commitment--to standards that are most justly described as "absolute," although he has widened his scope from literature to include history, social tradition, ethics, and theology.⁷ In recent years the tone of his criticism has become, as he himself has described it, "didactic" and "theological."⁸ The man of letters in this secularized age, he believes, "must recreate for his age the image of man; he must propagate standards by which other men may test that image, and distinguish

¹Interview, September 8, 1957, Princeton, New Jersey.

²See Invitation to Learning, edited by Allen Tate, Huntington Cairns, and Mark Van Doren (New York: Random House, 1941). Through a discussion of such classics as Machiavelli's The Prince, Aristotle's Ethics, Pascal's Pensées, The Book of Job, Da Vinci's Notebooks, Hegel's Philosophy of History, The Education of Henry Adams, Tolstoy's War and Peace, Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound, Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, Dante's Divine Comedy, and Milton's Paradise Lost, Tate revealed elements of his views on politics, ethics, religion, science, history, autobiography, fiction, drama, criticism, poetry and philosophy.

³"Is Literary Criticism Possible?" The Man of Letters, p. 166.

⁴The Fugitives: A Critical Account, p. 108.

⁵Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas (1936), Reason in Madness (1941), On the Limits of Poetry (1948), The Hovering Fly (1949), The Forlorn Demon (1953), and The Man of Letters in the Modern World: Selected Essays, 1928-1955 (1955).

⁶"Preface," The Man of Letters, p. 7.

⁷See ibid., p. 6.

⁸See The Forlorn Demon: Didactic and Critical Essays, especially "The Man of Letters in the Modern World," pp. 3-17; "The Angelic Imagination: Poe as God," pp. 56-78.

the false from the true."¹ It is in such absolutes and in such statements as the following--

The battle is now between the dehumanized society of secularism . . . and the eternal society of the communion of the human spirit.²

--that Tate reveals his religious orientation both as a critic and as a man. He has written that "the very terms of elucidation--the present ones, like any others--carry with them, concealed, an implicated judgment. The critic's rhetoric, laid out in his particular grammar, is the critic's mind."³ It has been suggested that Tate's conversion to Roman Catholicism--he joined the Church in 1950--is related to his theological orientation and to his use of "extraliterary criteria" in theoretical criticism.⁴ To explain his assumptions, the authorities he appeals to,⁵ and the striking moralistic tone of his later essays (in The Forlorn Demon, for instance), as resulting largely from his conversion is to oversimplify and to misrepresent or ignore, to some degree, his lifelong search for authority.⁶ Although he has never written or spoken publicly about the "causes" of his profession of the faith, he has said, as Cardinal Newman had, that there were "powerful and concurrent reasons."⁷ It would seem that what Tate had

¹"The Man of Letters in the Modern World," The Man of Letters, p. 11.

²Ibid., p. 12. Emphasis supplied.

³"Is Literary Criticism Possible?" The Man of Letters, p. 173. This proposition, along with nine others, Tate announced as "theses, which either I or some imaginable person might be presumed to uphold at the present time" (p. 170).

Tate's willingness to speak in absolutes led Harvey Breit, New York Times Book Review columnist to write in admiration of Tate's introduction of Eliot: "In this careful age of endless shadings and fearful salutation, we salute Mr. Tate for his bold belief [Tate had introduced Eliot as "the most eminent man of letters in the world, the greatest living poet"]; in this hesitant time of do-I-dare-to-eat-a-peach, such a cleanly aimed absolute amounts to nobility" ("In and Out of Books," The New York Times Book Review, September 30, 1956, p. 8). (The occasion was the annual Gideon Seymour Lecture at the University of Minnesota.)

⁴See, for example, John Bradbury, The Fugitives, pp. 109-110, 119.

⁵In The Forlorn Demon, for instance, he cites or quotes from Jacques Maritain, Charles Williams, Pascal, and T. S. Eliot, among others.

⁶More than twenty years ago John Gould Fletcher sensed in Tate his need for authority--which was to end in the Church: "Tate," he wrote in his autobiography, "was, as Poe and Coleridge and Beaudelaire had been before him, a perfectionist. Some terrible remnant of a world-blasting, medieval Catholicism was at work within him, . . . The world lay under the shadow of damnation" (Life Is My Song, pp. 343-44.)

⁷Maritain, Tate agrees, has influenced his thinking, but the nature of that influence cannot be defined exactly, he has said. Also among "those powerful and concurrent reasons" for his conversion is the fact that there have been Catholics in his mother's family: her father was a

noted three decades ago as lacking in the age of Emily Dickinson he had by 1950 found for himself: ". . . a body of ideas that . . . bear upon the course of the spirit and yet remain coherent as a rational instrument."¹

In fact, Tate himself as critic-editor of America's most distinctive poetry of the past half century, spoke as one who recognizes the influences of tastes, experiences, philosophical and moral convictions on his judgment as a critic:

My interests in the past thirty years having been not aloof but committed, a certain compound of philosophical bias, common loyalty, and obscure prejudice, must insensibly have affected my views of the entire half-century.²

But here Tate could have been speaking also of his practices as a poet, for his deepest commitment is to poetry. Although he has never been convinced that the poet can really change society or that the poet should become the acknowledged legislator of the world,³ he has asserted that the poet has an obligation--to himself as a poet and as a human being, and perhaps to others of like mind:

[The poet] is responsible to his conscience . . . the joint action of knowledge and judgment. . . . [He] is not responsible to society for a version of what it thinks it is or what it wants. . . . He is responsible for the virtue proper to him as a poet, for his special arête: for the mastery of a disciplined language which will not shun the full report of the reality conveyed to him by his awareness: he must hold, in Yeats' great phrase, "reality and justice in a single thought."⁴

Tate's devotion to this "completest mode of utterance,"⁵ has been recognized over the past three decades. Like Ransom and Warren, he has won the

Catholic and there were seven Jesuit priests among his relatives in the eighteenth century. Although Tate's maternal grandfather became an apostate, he sent his daughters to the Visitation Convent at Washington for their education. (interview, April 23, 1957)

¹"Emily Dickinson," The Man of Letters, p. 211. Recently Tate received the annual Christian Culture Series award given to a nonclergyman for "forwarding Christian ideals" (The Minnesota Daily, May 13, 1958, p. 2).

²"Reflections on American Poetry: 1900-1950," The Sewanee Review, LXIV, 1 (January, 1956), 65. This essay introduces the collection of American and British poetry edited with Lord David Cecil.

³In the "Preface" to his collection of essays On the Limits of Poetry (1948) Tate observed, "on reading my essays over, I found that I was talking most of the time about what poetry cannot be expected to do to save mankind from the disasters in which poetry must itself be involved. That, I suppose, is a limit of poetry" (p. xi).

⁴"To Whom Is the Poet Responsible?" The Man of Letters, p. 32.

⁵I. A. Richards' definition of poetry, quoted by Tate in "Literature as Knowledge," The Man of Letters, p. 62.

Caroline Sinkler Prize of the Poetry Society of South Carolina, in 1928 and 1932. The Midland Author's Prize was awarded to him in 1933, and the publication of On the Limits of Poetry and his Poems: 1922-1947 brought him the \$1000 National Institute of Arts and Letters grant in 1948 for "distinguished service to American letters." In 1956 he was awarded the Bollingen Prize in poetry for "the achievement of his poetic work both collected and current and his lifetime devotion to the high defense of art." The Brandeis Medal Award for poetry was granted to him early in 1961. Other forms of recognition have come to him as a poet: the Chair of Poetry at the Library of Congress in 1943-44,¹ the editorship of the poetry and belles lettres division of the Henry Holt Company from 1946-48; a delegate for the United States to the International Exposition of the Arts in Paris and to the UNESCO Conference on the Arts in Venice, both in 1952.

Over three decades he has published six volumes of poetry² and for the past several years he has been at work on a long autobiographical poem. The same themes that have concerned him as a critic have engaged him as a poet: the loss of a tradition and myth in a modern, sterile, wasteland world; the fragmentation of man's aesthetic, social, and spiritual being, a result of his existence in a materialistic society of specialists; a lack of a historical perspective, and a failure of faith. The disciplined style and rhetoric³ of Tate's poetry reflect also the quality of his critical mind: the concepts are often abstract; the patterns, emerging from concrete brilliant images, complex; the vocabulary often latinate and precise; the mode allusive, ironic, and authoritative. More than thirty years ago, Donald Davidson, characterizing Tate's writing with the mot juste--"astringent"--also prophetically uttered the criticism most commonly made of Tate's poetry:

I clap my hands just as I might for a difficult series of Liszt cadenzas, performed with great skill, but my enthusiasm has no passion in it. I think the reason is this. Your poetry, like your criticism is so astringent that it bites and dissolves what it touches.⁴

Some twenty years later F. O. Matthiessen wrote that Tate's verse reveals

. . . the kind of intellectualization from which Eliot's richer lyrical impulse saved him, the intellectualization of a mind in which the analytical function outruns the creative. Despite Tate's objection to the limiting abstractness of so much modern knowledge, many of his

¹In this post Tate, at the request of the State Department, compiled and annotated a list of America's most distinguished recent poetry; Sixty American Poets, 1896-1944 was the result.

²Mr. Pope and Other Poems (1928), Poems: 1928-1931 (1932), The Mediterranean and Other Poems (1936), Selected Poems (1937), The Winter Sea (1944), Poems: 1922-1947 (1948).

³I use "rhetoric" as Tate himself thinks of it--in the tradition of Aristotle and later Christian rhetoricians: "The study of the full language of experience, not the specialized languages of method," through which truth can be attained ("Is Literary Criticism Possible?" The Man of Letters, p. 168).

⁴Letter to Allen Tate, February 15, 1927.

poems are conceived very abstractly. . . . Despite too numerous echoes of Eliot and Valery, Tate's structure and rhythm have attained a rare elevation and dignity.¹

But Tate is a practicing poet and his autobiographical poem, three portions of which have already appeared in print, would seem to be less abstractly conceived. Both "The Maimed Man" and "The Swimmers,"² indicate that the poet on the narrative level is recounting certain childhood experiences viewed now, as Louis Rubin says, "through the eyes of his adult religious faith." "The poet seems to be reliving his past--the South, his boyhood there--against the perspective of the eternal, and equating his childhood reactions to evil in all the innocence of boyhood, with his mature attitudes."³ So the poet, looking back to a day beside clear spring Kentucky water recalls his frightened observation of a lynched, faceless Negro being brought back to town by a posse; and seeks, through supplication, a renewal of a whole, childlike faith now strengthened by his sharing of the knowledge of evil:

O fountain, bosom source undying-dead,
Replenish me the spring of love and fear
And give me back the eye that looked and fled
When a thrush idling in the tulip tree
Unwound the cold dream of the copperhead.⁴

Tate has recently characterized his poetry as a search for that faith, that "spring of love and fear," and a desire to recover it: "As I look back upon my own verse, written over more than twenty-five years, I see plainly that its main theme is man suffering from unbelief; and I cannot for a moment suppose that this man is some other than myself."⁵

¹"Poetry," Literary History of the United States, II, 1347.

²The first section appeared in The Partisan Review, May, 1952; the second in The Hudson Review, Winter, 1953, and was reprinted in Perspectives, No. 6, Winter, 1954; Section III, "The Buried Lake," appeared in the spring issue of The Sewanee Review, 1953. The poem will have nine sections; two more are almost done.

³"The Serpent in the Mulberry Bush," Southern Renaissance, p. 366.

⁴"The Swimmers," Perspectives, No. 6, Winter, 1954, p. 77.

⁵As quoted by Rubin, Southern Renaissance, p. 367.

Georgians have a peculiar loyalty to their native habitat. "The Georgian," wrote Professor William Treat of those living in the early nineteenth century, "has an 'honest and hearty' pride in his state, and a sort of masonic affiliation with every person, animal, institution, in short, thing--that can be called Georgian."¹ According to this description, John Donald Wade, born in Marshallville, Macon County, Georgia, in 1892, is unmistakably a native son.

Biographer, editor, teacher, and founder and president of a local foundation for the encouragement of learning and the arts in his immediate section, John Wade has through his various careers remained a devoted Southerner. Some years ago, while discussing the nature of Southern humor, he spoke of the power his region has long wielded over him:

I learned the word [southern] early, and as a child in a Georgia village-school yearned at times to emulate some of my less restrained peers and punch out with a pencil-point the eyes of the northern generals pictured in my text-books. Restrained, I comforted myself by inscribing encomiastic phrases under the pictures of southern generals. Later I learned better than to wish to occupy myself so barbarously. But I knew then, and I know still, how to look at a book and without reading it to be aware, somehow, of every word on the pages that remotely looks southern. I conceived it as my duty, once, over many years, to inspect that word every time it occurred . . . and to ascertain the veracity or falsehood of the sentence containing it. . . . I was powerfully affected if it declared the southern temperament sluggish, or, on the other hand, if it declared it generous.²

Such devotion and sensitivity are the result of a heritage nurtured into an appreciation of a way of life embodying a "tradition of generous living," with its roots in the land and the church.³

Wade's Georgian ancestry goes back to his great-great-grandfather, John Adam Treutlen, who was the first governor of Georgia after it attained statehood; from 1837 when his grandmother and grandfather migrated from South Carolina, there have been Wades in the Marshallville area. His

¹Southern Statesmen (New York, 1897), pp. 199-200, as quoted by John D. Wade in Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, p. 70.

²"Southern Humor," A Vanderbilt Miscellany, edited by Richmond Crom Beatty, p. 189. First published in W. T. Couch's Culture in the South, this essay was singled out for praise by Virginia Quarterly Review editor, Stringfellow Barr as "full of insight and free of literal-mindedness."--"A Reconstructed South," Virginia Quarterly Review, X (April, 1954), 277.

³Wade has described the church as an uncle saw it: "an indispensable symbol of the basic craving of humanity for an integrity which it must aspire to, if it can never quite exemplify."--"The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius," I'll Take My Stand, pp. 279, 288.

father, John Daniel Wade, a country doctor¹ serving in a rich fruit farm area for fifty years, died when Wade was thirteen, and Wade grew up considerably influenced by his mother's father, a planter who had moved from farm to village after the Civil War--a move, wrote Wade, that "did not indicate an abandonment of his farm; [but] . . . only that in a life that seemed insecure these people found comfort in being physically near one another."²

Like most of the other Agrarians, Wade received his early education and his initial college degree in the South. He attended the public school of Marshallville, then entered the University of Georgia, graduating in 1914 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and history. His migration north for a Master of Arts was also traditional in the South. In explaining his temporary transplanting, Wade wrote:

There were almost no Ph.D. degrees offered in the South in 1914. I had done pretty well as a student and my family felt that only Harvard could be adequate for me! At Harvard I was probably most influenced by Barret Wendell . . . who was responsible for my transferring to Columbia University to study under W. P. Trent. He felt that since I was most interested in the South, Trent was the best man for me to work with. All of this time, I was extremely sensitive about the South; all of the capital S's on any page that I turned to rose from the text quickly to my eyes. In general I came away from the North (after all, I had known only the Humanities groups at Harvard and Columbia) feeling that most of the people I had met there felt about matters in general pretty much as I did.³

Wade was granted a Master of Arts degree from Harvard in 1915 and a Ph.D. from Columbia in 1924. (His study for the doctorate was interrupted by service as a second lieutenant in the Army and by teaching in the English department at the University of Georgia where he went in 1919.)

¹Wade's family have been devout Methodists--his grandfather Daniel Wade had been a local elder and circuit steward of Marshallville. He relates this revealing anecdote about the relationship between his father's knowledge of medicine and his devotion to religion: "Dr. Wade was a man of great moderation in most things, and though he avoided the imputation of availing himself of the comforts of alcohol (along with the discomforts) . . . he did not escape the imputation of 'atheism'. . . . for all his being a Methodist since early childhood, [he] was once to his face taxed with being irregular in religion--'If you are not an atheist, Doctor,' someone once said to him, 'if you are not an atheist, will you be good enough to explain to me immaculate birth of Jesus?' 'That,' Dr. Wade replied, 'I shall be glad to undertake if you will first explain to me the processes of ordinary birth.'--"The Marshallville Methodist Church From Its Beginning to 1950" (Marshallville, 1952; mimeographed), p. 109.

²Letter to Virginia Rock, July 17, 1958.

³Ibid.

Wade's career as a teacher, except for one two-year interval,¹ continued from 1919 until 1946. During this time he served at several institutions: the University of Georgia (1919-1925 and 1934-1946) at which he became head of the Department of English and of the Division of Language and Literature in 1939; and Vanderbilt University (1928-1934), where he directed the development of graduate work and the Ph.D. in American literature; for several summers he also taught at the University of North Carolina and Duke University. Mr. Wade's special interests as a teacher of literature, he wrote, "lived on a Bridge between American History and American Literature (both slanted south-wise), the Bridge supported by all that I could know or theorize about in any lines (the main line slanted toward History and Literature in general)." As a teacher he sought also "to arouse curiosity, to further appreciation, to exalt clarity, and to support intellectual discipline."²

But teaching was not Wade's only academic activity. He has held two distinguished editorial posts. In 1927 he was asked by the American Council of Learned Societies to serve as an editor for the twenty-volume Dictionary of American Biography. During that year he completed research for and wrote more than one hundred biographies of Americans of varying degrees of fame and importance,--statesmen, lawyers, teachers, college presidents, and philanthropists, Americans from every region, from colonial times to the early twentieth century. Even in the compressed form necessary for the DAB, Wade's distinctive astringent quality as a stylist is apparent. His account of the life of Charles Henry Crandall (1858-1923), a minor Connecticut poet, for instance, reveals a characteristic understated irony: Crandall's patriotic, conventional poems, many of them inspired by World War I, suggests Wade, were a reflection of the attitude that the War was "a holy and invincible crusade for everything that spiritual men most ardently and most rightfully desire, and at the conclusion of it, he [Crandall] believed, we should all be justly happy. One day, less than five years after the war ended, he killed himself with a pistol."³ Commenting on his DAB activities led Wade to reveal his suspicions about materialistic motivations implicit in the doctrine of Progress:

My duties involved the writing of biographical sketches, some of my own choice, others that I had by assignment. In this work I came to know that some of our most revered heroes and evangels of Progress seemed to me to have been fully as regardful of their personal advancement materially, as with that of the Race in general. I somehow felt that that was a poor trait to show up in Sir Galahad.⁴

The formulation of Wade's Agrarian views he himself attributes in some significant degree to his discoveries while writing DAB portraits:

¹He was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1926 and an assistant editor of the Dictionary of American Biography in 1927.

²Letter to Virginia Rock, August 5, 1958.

³DAB, vol. IV, 503.

⁴Letter to Virginia Rock, July 17, 1958.

All of us [contributors of the symposium] were of course distressed by the developments of the 1920's. . . . My own conviction that a remedy lay in our own tradition rather than in socialism sprang chiefly, I suppose, from the work I did during 1927-28 for the Dictionary of American Biography. I was in Washington at the time on the DAB staff, and it was my fortune to have to write sketches of a number of Americans of minor note who flourished 1860-1900. There I picked up many notions. When I went to Vanderbilt to teach, I was interested to find some people who entertained notions somewhat like my own.¹

Wade's second editorship was of The Georgia Review, founded in 1946 when he helped to secure the support of the University of Georgia to establish a journal, one aim of which was, as he put it, "to be alert not merely against the false and stupid, but particularly against these two when they come disguised in good-sense's clothing, that is to say, against all manner of high-brow cliché, faddism, and tish-tosh."² Wade served as editor until 1950 and has, since then, been a member of the editorial board.

His first full-length publication, a biography of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, was in part the result of a suggestion by Columbia Professor W. P. Trent, in part the interest Wade had in his own region. Regarded as the definitive study of the Georgia judge, the biography apparently represented for Wade something more than a means toward securing the Ph.D. The subtitle, A Study in the Development of Culture in the South, suggests its emphasis, and the study, said Wade, led him "to understand that my subject was in many regards superior to the forces that overthrew him, a sort of Parson Adams, perhaps. . . ."³ Widely and favorably reviewed, it was described as a work "of high merit as a picture of manners and embryonic culture . . . [a] book [which] combines the reliability derived from careful research with the animating force of a fresh, curious, humorous and impartial mind."⁴ So fresh and unorthodox was his treatment that he succeeded in arousing one Southern reviewer's indignation:

This is one of the most dangerous books that has appeared in the South in many a day. Not since Mr. Dickens and Mrs. Trollope visited our shores have American ideals and customs received as mean and petty a blow as is dealt them in this book--a book . . . which piously parades under the sub-title of "A Study of the Development of Culture in the South." Professor Wade takes a grand old antebellum character . . . a genuine gentleman of the old school, and builds up around him a pack of the most monstrous implications that have ever appeared between the covers of a book. . . . He would

¹Letter to Grace Stone, quoted in her article, "Tennessee: Social and Economic Laboratory," Sewanee Review, XLVI (July-September, 1938), 333.

²Mimeographed announcement to prospective Georgia Review benefactors, Fall, 1946.

³Letter to Virginia Rock, July 17, 1958.

⁴The Springfield Republican, June 8, 1924, p. 7a.

have us believe that in those glorious old times there was not much civilization after all;

Shall we permit the outside world to be told that our ancestors were rude, uncultured, uncouth people? Shall we suffer other people to be told that the principles for which our progenitors bled and died have been ignominiously rejected by an ungrateful progeny?¹

The subject of Wade's second book reflects another facet of his interests: religion, or more specifically, the Christian church as it has come directly to his attention, particularly in Methodism. In the preface to the biography, John Wesley, Wade spoke of the familial impulse which led him to write about the founder the sect most familiar to him:

My own interest originates in the Methodist preoccupation of certain members of my family. [One of his grandfathers was a Methodist preacher, the other a superintendent of a Methodist Sunday School for more than fifty years.] The legend that came down to me about one of these men and my acquaintance with the other made me know that Methodism was a worthy force. For the most resounding testimonial anything can have is the avowed interest and evident affection entertained for it by men who are incontestably good. . . .²

That Wade considers religion an important aspect of life is suggested also in his literary criticism. In discussing the novels of Thomas Wolfe, for instance, he denies Wolfe's catholicity as a writer because he fails to deal with religion. "It is highly probable," Wade declared, "that in 1935 it may still be found here or there performing nobly. . . . Yet for all of Mr. Wolfe's testimony, religion might never have existed to any good purpose."³ Of Wade's knowledge of Methodism, Davidson, a close friend, wrote: "No layman and few if any preachers knew the history of Methodism as he did--or, for that matter, the general religious life of the South."

It was probably this knowledge, combined with his devotion to his community, that led Wade to undertake the research (together with two other Marshallville residents) and to write in 1952 "The Marshallville Methodist Church From Its Beginning to 1950." The account (marked not only by a generous documentation from diaries and church records preserved for more than a century, but also by a sensitivity to the human) suggests something of Wade's character as a scholar, writer, and human being. It is anecdotal and factual, marked with a wry, friendly humor and a restrained piquancy. Such a passage as the following reveals some of these characteristics:

¹Quoted by Howard Odum, An American Epoch: Southern Portraiture in the National Picture (New York, 1930), pp. 106-107.

²John Wesley (New York, 1930), p. viii.

³"Prodigal: An Essay on Thomas Wolfe," The Southern Review, I (July, 1935), 192.

⁴"Counterattack, 1930-1940," p. 53.

The taboos that 1950 reveres, perhaps as basically porous as those of 1900, are certainly less numerous--so emphatically less numerous that 1950 may be thought of as skirting narrowly upon the grave-dangerline of No-Taboos whatever. In case that the old proscriptions and ways out may be needed again, some day, in an emergency, it is well to record a few of them lest they be lost record of.

There was a house that burned in the 1870's, a great house with twelve great white columns. The fire and the smoke billowed to heaven. Alas, what else could those people have looked for?--their house was full, full of French novels. . . . There was another house that burned about the same time, a big house with a big room that youngsters danced in. And as it burned, out from one of the broad rock chimney-bases writhed countless loathesome serpents. About that, the least one could do was to preserve an awful silence--for it would not do to neglect a token utterly.

And in the roster of sins, there was of course the Theater. Shakespeare was permissible sterile-pure as he was understood to be and Ben Hur and Rip Van Winkle were, but beyond those, there was a risk, beyond those, one would do well to think that what one had seen in Macon had been a concert, or a pageant, perhaps. . . . Nothing is more indicative of the loosening disciplines than the fact that movies and automobiles, that came late to the Feast, were never cried out against as the theater was, or as Sunday horse-and-buggy-riding was.¹

In addition to his two biographical studies, Wade has published book reviews and articles on various aspects of Southern culture, literary figures, and leaders in the South, including Joel Chandler Harris, Erskine Caldwell, Thomas Wolfe, Tom Watson, and Henry Grady. Journals in which his articles have appeared include The Southern Review, The Virginia Quarterly Review, The American Review, the American Mercury, and The Georgia Review. He was also a contributor to the Literary History of the United States and co-edited Masterworks of World Literature (1947) with Edwin Everett and Calvin Brown.

While teaching at the University of Georgia, Wade was married in 1942 to Julia Floyd Stovall. They have one daughter, Anne Treutlen.

Wade's deeply rooted devotion to his region and to his local community has been manifested not only in his critical writings but also in his activity to preserve the traditions of a Southern heritage: he created the Marshallville Foundation in 1944, the purpose of which, he wrote, was "to enable former residents . . . (natives, mostly, who grew 'abroad') to do good works at home, without fancy expenditures for overhead, expert advice and so on."² The Foundation has encouraged Georgia artists (two paintings are bought each year by the Foundation and exhibited in a community house); it helps with the local library, a community house, and a swimming place; it offers scholarships and prizes "very few and very small of necessity," said Wade, "handed out in a way that some of us here feel

¹"The Marshallville Methodist Church from Its Beginning to 1950," p. 83.

²Letter to Virginia Rock, April 20, 1956.

would help make reason, the will of God and so on and so on prevail more readily than they might prevail normally."¹ Writing of friends and families of Marshallville, Wade indicated one of the reasons for his devotion to his locale:

. . . it was evident by the 1880's that the second generation of the ancient families here--truly "ancient," somehow, by American Standards, though only fifty years were involved--would for all of its time maintain the distinction of its origins. For this generation exhibited in a surprisingly high number of individuals a physical resiliency, an elevation of mind and character, and a practical effectiveness that was remarkable in view of the economic and political restrictions then riveted upon the entire South.

Later, as these restrictions began to be somewhat loosened, they were loosened first in the cities. But for a long time the odds of city life were not clearly superior to those elsewhere, and Marshallville's second generation were irrevocably committed to the home of their birth. Another twenty-five years would display the situation more clearly and many of the more vigorous members of the third generation would go away. But that future was hidden and as long as the second generation lasted--many of its members survived far into their eighties--the general personal level of this community was almost incredibly worthy.²

Like the other Agrarians, Wade has been concerned with the preservation of values inhering in a culture based on the land. Like them, too, he has regarded the claims for the superiority of a culture dependent on finance capital and machines with certain reservations. Yet, in representing varying points of view--the Old South and the New South, the "Prophets" and the "Promoters"--Wade has sounded his doubts more often in overtones and undertones rather than in explicit attacks or condemnations. Discussing the acceptance of the philosophy of the New South advocates and Henry W. Grady's ideas in particular, Wade ironically observed:

The South was about to be redeemed from that thralldom [to poverty]. The Sun of Progress stood tip-toe on the misty mountain tops, and the beneficent dew of Northern capital could be seen already here and there, making certain pastures mighty lush--with here a coal mine, there a cotton mill.³

Occasionally, however, Wade makes a more explicit statement, when, for instance, he describes the contrast between the effects of an agrarian and urban culture; in his essay, "Southern Humor" it is impossible to mistake Wade's loyalties, even if one did not know of his affiliation with the Nashville Agrarians:

¹Ibid.

²"The Marshallville Methodist Church From Its Beginning to 1950," p. 62.

³"Henry W. Grady," The Southern Review, III (Winter, 1938), 495-96.

. . . As industrialism proceeded men became specialists, and as population grew denser it became necessary for every man to rule out from his consciousness the ups and downs of most of the people he had contact with. It became necessary, in short, for people to act as if they believed other people were made out of metal rather than of flesh and blood.

.
More progressive sections than ours may actually reach, via standardization, before the world ends, that Heaven of deadly uniformity which I am apprehensive of. But I am sure that such a Heaven must be very disagreeable, and that no one of cultivated sensibilities would desire it, were it not for gullibility, latent in the best of us, which teaches men to desire anything which calls itself by an agreeable name.¹

Donald Davidson, one of the Agrarians to whom Wade feels closest, has described some of the distinctive personal qualities of this Georgian:

. . . it was the unique personal attraction of John Wade as John Wade that drew us to him as he more and more enriched our councils with his wit and wisdom, his knowledge of men and manners, his eloquence salty and profound. There was no tale of Owsley's or Lytle's that John Wade could not match from the Georgia side. Affection grew as some of us began to visit him in his home surroundings at Marshallville, among his peach orchards, camellias, and wide plantation acres.²

Wade himself revealed something of his personality in his review of an "old" book, The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come by John Fox, Jr. There he writes of a by-gone "happy faith" in "good people," of reading the story to a "hand-picked audience"--a woman in her forties and a girl of twelve--on a "steamy-hot Sunday afternoon" as they "huddled content about an air-conditioner in a shaded room," of weeping and exulting by turns over the little shepherd's experiences:

. . . in all of us lives perpetually the sanguine child, pinnacled on suspense. So this story went far with me when I first read it as an adolescent, perhaps pre or post--though at the time I was happily ignorant of my classification. And so it again went far with me only a year or so back. . . .

When he asks--"how much Mary and little Mary and I, on that Sunday afternoon, would have been better off had we, instead of reading a forgotten novel, given ourselves to more fashionable diversions--junior to play, supervised by the most 'trained' of experts, and the other two of us, to the most intricate rubber of Bridge, . . ."3--one instinctively answers, feeling it could be Wade's, "Not a bit, not a bit."

¹In A Vanderbilt Miscellany, pp. 194, 203.

²"Counterattack, 1930-1940," pp. 53-54.

³"Old Books," The Georgia Review, XI (Summer, 1957), 215, 216.

In 1959 Robert Penn Warren described in an illuminating and absorbing essay the writing of one of his fine short stories, "Blackberry Winter,"--a rendering of a Tennessee youth's "passage" from childhood to maturity. Warren's account of his experience in completing the story not only reveals something about the mystery of the creative process but also much about Warren as Southerner and artist. For Warren recollects, in following the thread that had spun from his consciousness of the past:

I had no idea where it was going, if anywhere. Sitting at the typewriter was merely a way of indulging nostalgia. But something has to happen in a story, if there is to be more than a dreary lyric poem posing as a story. . . .

The tramp who thus walked into the story . . . had been waiting a long time in the wings of my imagination--an image based, no doubt, on a dozen unremembered episodes from childhood, . . . a creature altogether lost and pitiful, a dim image of what, in one perspective, our human condition is.¹

The story, in essence, embodies the artist's experience of the tensions of "self-consciousness and self-criticism," of "elation and pain." But it does more: it represents the central themes or motifs that have absorbed Warren as a writer of fiction, as critic, poet, and dramatist.

Warren's interest in exploring and rendering the human condition by representing "whatever people do in their doubleness of living in a present and a past" is realized in "Blackberry Winter" through his shift in emphasis "from the lyricism of nostalgia to a concern with the jags and injustices of human relationships," to a concern for giving "some notion that out of change and loss a human recognition may be redeemed, more precious for no longer being innocent." Like the boy in the story, Warren's other works embody a movement from a state of mind--described by Warren--as escape, going back, hunting old bearings into "a kind of detached summary of the work of time," into "some hint of the adult's grim orientation toward . . . an imaginative recognition of the 'meaning of life.'"² Warren's world of fiction is shadowed by death and violence, by the individual's loss of the innocence enjoyed in a timeless world, through the impingement of time, self-awareness, and the experience of guilt upon his "glistening auroral beach." Through all the corruption and violence, sex, death, and self-torture, man can and will endure. In one of his most explicit statements, Warren observed:

In the pain of isolation [man] may achieve the courage and clarity of mind to envisage the tragic pathos of life, and once he realizes that the tragic experience is universal and a corollary of man's place in nature. . . . Man eats of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and

¹"Writer at Work: How a Story Was Born and How, Bit by Bit, It Grew," New York Times Book Review, March 1, 1959, p. 5.

²Ibid., all quoted phrases in the paragraph above, if not otherwise acknowledged, are from the Times book review article.

falls. But if he takes another bite, he may get at least a sort of redemption.¹

So Thomas Jefferson, in Brother to Dragons (1953), discovers the "slimed foundations" of his kinsmen's moral nature and asks the anguished question: "What's left, at least, of the hope I once had?" His answer is no longer his optimistic hope that "the dream of the future is better than the dream of the past" but rather the realization

That the dream of the future is not
Better than the fact of the past, no matter how terrible,
For without the fact of the past we cannot dream
the future.²

Warren's rejection of the Jeffersonian myth of human perfectibility is the burden of much of his fiction and poetry; it underlies, too, his views of history and politics, of social and economic problems.

Indeed, Warren's background, education, and "the worlds [he] had seen" (as he describes his experiences)³ have all combined to give him "the most penetrating and most beautifully disciplined historical imagination we have,"⁴ although this is not to suggest that he is a mere "historical novelist." As Warren regards history it is "the big myth we live, and in our living, constantly remake."⁵ In this sense only is Warren a "historical" novelist, for his characters live into the basic patterns evolving in time and space.

As in the case of the other Agrarians, a series of circumstances happened to be fused to direct Warren into a world where ideas are dramatized or embodied in art forms. It is not an unimportant consideration that he was born a Southerner--in Guthrie, Todd County, Kentucky, in 1905,⁶ nor that in his early childhood he had watched troops march into his birthplace to establish martial law over the night-riding tobacco growers. Always a voracious reader, he had absorbed Lycidas as a boy and as a young

¹"Knowledge and the Image of Man," address at Columbia University, 1954, as quoted by Leonard Casper, Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground (Seattle, 1960), p. 5. Mr. Casper's book is to date the most complete, perceptive single work on the entire body of Warren's writing. Not only does it summarize past criticisms of Warren and offer the first complete checklist of Warren's published work, but it also treats his novels, stories, poetry, and criticism in terms of "man's search for identity apart from utility."

²Brother to Dragons, p. 193.

³Interview, "The Art of Fiction, XVIII," p. 117.

⁴Arthur Mizener, Review of Band of Angels, New York Times Book Review, August 21, 1955, p. 1.

⁵"Foreword," Brother to Dragons, p. xii.

⁶Warren was the eldest child of a businessman and schoolteacher.

adult he was familiar with English and American historians, Elizabethan poets and dramatists, and became excited about modern poets, including Yeats, Eliot, and Hart Crane.¹ And it was a significant coincidence that he was a student at Vanderbilt (he entered in 1922) when the Fugitives were meeting in the living room of Dr. Sidney Mtttron Hirsch and had begun to publish their poetry in their own literary journal. Although Warren had come to Vanderbilt to study science, he found chemistry a "damned dull" course. Instead, his growing interest in letters was stimulated and reinforced when he was invited to join Ransom's advanced composition class and a year later when he enrolled in Davidson's survey of English literature from Beowulf to Hardy. It was then that Warren began to "write poetry hard" and ventured to show some of his efforts to Allen Tate.² As a result of these associations and activities, Warren was invited to join the Fugitives who elected him to membership in February, 1924.³ This, said Warren, "was my education. . . . I was exposed to the liveliness and range of talk and the wrangle of argument. . . . But most of all I got the feeling that poetry was . . . related to ideas and to life."

Warren's academic achievements were recognized by election to Phi Beta Kappa, and the award of the Founder's Scholarship Medal ("conferred upon the graduate who attains the highest average grade of distinction in his four years of work"). He was graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree (1925).⁵ From Vanderbilt, Warren moved west, then east: he was a teaching fellow in English for two years at the University of California where he received his Master of Arts degree in 1927; the following year he spent in graduate study at Yale. In 1928 Warren won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford and in 1930 he was granted a B. Litt.

¹Mrs. Cowan notes that on the publication of The Wasteland Davidson showed the poem immediately to Warren who discussed it with his three professors (Curry, Ransom, and Davidson), pp. 107-108.

²Tate's account of his first meeting with Warren succeeds not only in representing the beginning of a warm, personal relationship but also in capturing the excitement of discovering a rare talent: "I became aware of a presence at my back [while I was typing a poem]," said Tate, "and turning round I saw the most remarkable looking boy I had ever laid eyes on. He was tall and thin, and when he walked across the room, he made a sliding shuffle, as if his bones didn't belong to one another." He had a long quivering nose, large brown eyes, ["not brown, green or hazel or something," says Warren] and a long chin--all topped by curly red hair. He spoke in a soft whisper, asking to see my poem; then he showed me one of his own--it was about Hell, and I remember this line:

Where lightly bloom the purple lilies. . . .

He said he was sixteen years old and a sophomore. This remarkable young man was 'Red' Robert Penn Warren, the most gifted person I have ever known" ("The Fugitive, 1922-1925,") pp. 81-82.

³Warren was made assistant editor, under Ransom, in his senior year at Vanderbilt.

⁴"The Art of Fiction XVIII," p. 122.

⁵Vanderbilt University Catalogues, 1926-1934.

Upon his return from England, Warren married Emma Cinina Brescia. They were divorced in 1950. In 1952 he married Eleanor Clark, author of the distinguished Rome and a Villa; they have two children, Rosanna Phelps and Gabriel Penn.

Warren's career as a full-time teacher began with his appointment as assistant professor in English at Southwestern College, Memphis, Tennessee, in 1930-1931; from there he went to Vanderbilt taking over some of Ransom's classes then in England on a Guggenheim fellowship. Remaining at Vanderbilt until June, 1934, Warren taught a variety of courses, including English drama from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century, modern literature and Shakespeare.¹ In 1934 he was appointed to the English department of Louisiana State University, where a year later he became co-editor of the Southern Review. With Clarence Pipkin as editor and Cleanth Brooks of co-managing editor, Warren helped to make this one of America's most distinguished little magazines.² Leaving Louisiana in 1942, he joined the faculty of the University of Minnesota where he taught literature and creative writing for eight years, with a one-year leave of absence (1944-45) to hold the Chair of Poetry at the Library of Congress. In 1950 he moved to Yale as a teacher of creative writing in the English department and the School of Drama. At this time, in an interview with a New York Times Book Review columnist, Warren expressed a view he had long held about the academic process: that it produces "truly profound and humanistic people who serve as a sort of buffer against the jittery, fashionable kind of thing."³

Yet, after six years at Yale Warren decided to leave teaching and to devote all his time to the writing of poetry, novels, critical essays, plays, and commentaries on the historical and contemporary scene. In 1939 he had felt: "For a person who wants to write, the advantages of teaching, I believe, outweigh the disadvantages; a teacher is forced to clarify--or try to clarify--his own mind on certain questions which are necessarily involved in the business of writing."⁴ By 1956 he had found that as a writer his energy was sapped by the very mechanics of teaching his own craft, while his mind and spirit, he said, missed the refreshment so often afforded in offering a course in literature.

Since his abdication from academia, Warren has continued his devotion to writing. In a National Book Award interview in 1958, Warren admitted, "Being human, I'm attracted to idleness, but I think a writer will write. You scratch where it itches. It's as simple as that." The

¹Ibid., 1932-34.

²The Southern Review served as an outlet for scores of articles by many of the new critics, for agrarians of many persuasions, and for the Nashville Agrarians in particular. For example, in the first volume, published in 1935-36 there appeared a total of twenty-two articles, poems, stories and book reviews by nine of the Twelve Southerners.

³Quoted by Harvey Breit, "Talk with Mr. Warren," New York Times Book Review, June 25, 1950, p. 20, in Casper, p. 35.

⁴Autobiographical Notes, Wilson Bulletin, XIII (June, 1939), 653, in Leonard Casper, "Art and Audience--Robert Penn Warren: Method and Canon," Dilemma Review, II (July, 1954), p. 263.

inherent impulse must be constant, for since 1956 he has published a collection of poems which won the National Book Award in 1957, Promises: Poems 1954-1956; an extended essay on Southern attitudes toward racial integration in Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South (first published in Life in May, 1956); two children's books for the Landmark series, Remember the Alamo! (1958) and The Gods of Mount Olympus (1959); Selected Essays (1958) a collection of his literary criticism, including his famous analysis of Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner; the novel The Cave (1959); and the stageplay, All the King's Men (1960). A second extended essay, "The Legacy of the Civil War: A Meditation on the Centennial," to be published in the spring of 1961, as a small book, also appeared in Life. A novel, Wilderness, set during the Civil War and portraying a German immigrant who joins the Union Army, is scheduled for a fall, 1961, publication.

That Warren prefers to write fiction and poetry to polemical essays is instinctive: "I can express my ideas more effectively, more concretely in a poem or story than in an essay which is a kind of abstraction,"¹ he has said. This realization had come soon after his return from England, where, as a Rhodes scholar, he had written his first piece of fiction, "Prime Leaf," completed while he was working on his contribution to I'll Take My Stand. "Briar Patch" made him aware of the fact that "if you are seriously trying to write fiction you can't allow yourself as much evasion as in trying to write an essay."²

Yet the material of his Southern heritage continued to permeate his work, although it was transformed into symbols appropriate to the world of art. Warren often uses for his settings, his characters, and the situations of his books, the places and people he has known, the events he has heard about from old men or accounts he has read in yellowed court records and old newspapers. Leonard Casper has noted that "despite exacting research, Warren has refused to restrict the identity of any character to that of Luke Lea or Huey Long or even Jereboam Beauchamp. . . . The value of his characters is that they are composites and therefore can present a kind of truth not available from the proxies of history."³ Even in his first book, published in 1929, the subject of his biography, John Brown engaged Warren's interest as a kind of abstract man, a symbol whose actions were motivated not entirely by altruistic concerns, a figure through whom Warren could approach a segment of the Southern experience. Jefferson, in Brother to Dragons, was a man who in one night defined for "a million or so people stranded on the edge of the continent . . . what they were and what they stood for."⁴ Night Rider (1939) represented the world of his childhood and was fashioned from "recollections of the way objects looked in Kentucky and Tennessee"⁵ during the tobacco wars. Even when he did not use past "historical" materials, as in At Heaven's Gate (1943)--a representation of a modern urban South stricken with the diseases of materialism, rootlessness, decadence--he still

¹Interview with Virginia Rock, September 4, 1957.

²"The Art of Fiction XVIII," p. 124.

³Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground, p. 9.

⁴"The Art of Fiction XVIII," p. 118.

⁵Ibid., p. 121.

molded his myth from "the shadow of events of that period."¹ This was the book, said Warren, which "whetted my desire to compose a highly documented picture of the modern world--at least, as the modern world manifested itself in the only region I knew well enough to write about."² All the King's Men (1946) was the result. In Huey Long, assassinated when Warren was at Louisiana State, in Mussolini who embodied for Warren "the wonderment and outrage at the fascist habit of equating glorified violence and success,"³ there were elements of the character of Willie Stark whose career exemplified the hard political truth that means defile ends; according to Warren, "he was a man whose power was based on the fact that somehow he could vicariously fulfill some secret needs of the people about him." World Enough and Time (1950) is a complex novel; based on an account in a pamphlet dated 1826, The Confessions of Jereboam O. Beauchamp, the novel reveals a variety of themes and problems with which Warren was concerned: the truth of history vs. the truth of fiction, the search for self and identity, the repudiation of the father, the realization of the past in the present. Band of Angels (1955) and The Cave (1959) have continued to interest, involve, and exasperate critics, in part because these seemed on the surface to appeal to a Hollywood-glutted audience, eagerly seeking new forms of shock. But these, too, are concerned with self-discovery. Carlos Baker, reviewing Band of Angels, noted that it gives "another thematic emphasis to his perennial preoccupation: the perils of self-deception in the blind lobby of self."⁴ Casper perceives the same theme in The Cave and suggests that such criticisms as those in the London Times Literary Supplement and The Observer⁵ fail to see "how all the major characters except for Ike . . . grope through desire for a reality beyond desire; explore the cave of one another, sometimes to escape the responsibilities of self through the violence of the act, sometimes to encounter a larger identity through the exchange of love."⁶

In recent years Warren has turned his attention again to the drama. Writing verse for the stage, he has said, has helped him considerably with his poetry. His first verse-prose play, still unpublished, was Proud Flesh, the original version of All the King's Men. Written in 1938-40 and rewritten in 1948-49, it was given its first public hearing in 1946 at the University of Minnesota. A second dramatic version of this Pulitzer prize novel was directed in New York City by Erwin Piscator for the New School for Social Research in 1947, and was produced in numerous other cities, both in the United States and abroad. Translated and published in German,

¹Idem.

²"Introduction," All the King's Men, p. iii.

³Casper, Robert Penn Warren: The Dark and Bloody Ground, p. 116.

⁴"Souls Lost in a Blind Lobby," Saturday Review of Literature, August 20, 1955.

⁵The British reviewers object to the crude satire and substitution of sexual motivation for "analyses properly rooted in social life and habit," and a "middle-aged mixture of apathy and pronography."--quoted by Casper, Robert Penn Warren, p. xv.

⁶Ibid.

it has had considerable success, particularly at the Ruhr Drama Festival in 1958. A third version, Willie Stark: His Rise and Fall, was directed by Aaron Frankel in a fine performance at the Margo Jones Theater in Dallas in 1958. So successful was it that Mark Schoenberg directed it in 1959 in a good off-Broadway run (for which it was renamed All the King's Men). Although critics, both in Dallas and New York, found the intellectual content of the drama imperfectly realized, they agreed that the play is "engrossing, . . ." that it "poses a formidable moral challenge,"¹ and that "neither the theme nor the presentation is ordinary theater."² Translated into Italian, French, and Polish, it has been seen and read abroad: it was presented on the radio in Rome, as a Cambridge University production (spring, 1958), and is to be offered in Warsaw.³ A two-part television production of All the King's Men in the summer of 1958, with which Warren incidentally was not connected, made another version available to a large American audience.

Brother to Dragons is poetry, cast in dramatic form, although it is not a play, says Warren. Out of the violence of an axe murder of a slave committed by Jefferson's two nephews, Warren wove a dialectic on the nature of man: human perfectibility vs. brutality, innocence vs. evil. Historical "facts" and poetic renderings fall into a mosaic of dramatic scenes and dialogues with "R.P.W." himself one of the "voices, moved by inner urgencies, and the urgencies of argument" to discuss the issue that in his view is "a human constant"⁴:

And my father and I, we sat in our common silence.
And I have been a strayer and stranger in many nations.
.
I have, in other words, shared the most common
Human experience which makes all mankind one,
For isolation is the common lot,
And paradoxically, it is only by
That isolation that we know how to name
The human bond and thus define the self.⁵

This was Warren's most impressive single poetic achievement until his recent collection of lyrics, Promises: 1954-1956. Earlier poems, from "To a Face in a Crowd" (included in the Fugitive anthology in 1928) to the "Kentucky Mountain Farm" series (in Thirty-six Poems, 1935) "Bearded Oaks" and "Terror," (in Eleven Poems on the Same Theme) and "The Ballad of Billie

¹Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, October 17 and 25, 1959.

²Virgil Miers, "On the Scene," The Dallas Times Herald, November 30, 1958, p. 2. (Amusements Section)

³Information about the sequence and productions of various versions of All the King's Men was secured from Casper's Robert Penn Warren . . . and letters from Warren to Virginia Rock, October 30, 1958, and March 15, 1961.

⁴Warren, Brother to Dragons [p. xiii].

⁵Ibid., pp. 205-6.

Potts" in his Selected Poems, 1923-1943, reflect Warren's central themes which had appeared in his novels through the preceding decade." Dedicated to his children, Rosanna of the sunlight, Gabriel of the moon, Promises reveals "that what is genuinely universal, neither statistical truth nor the abstracts of history, exists even in the particulars of one's own flesh."¹

Warren's criticism, both as perceptive reader and as self-aware artist, has been of a consistently high order. With Cleanth Brooks he has been instrumental in revolutionizing the teaching of literature in colleges and has influenced a whole generation of students.² The texts, Understanding Poetry (1938, 1951), and Understanding Fiction (1943, 1960, 3rd ed.), have advanced techniques for the reading of literature which are now identified as characteristic of the new criticism: a close reading of the work, independent of the heresies of the biographical, the historical, or the didactic approaches; an inductive examination of its elements; and an understanding that a work of art (a poem, for example) "should always be treated as an organic system of relationships, and the poetic quality should never be understood as inhering in one or more factors taken in isolation."³ The charges leveled against the new critics--among whom Warren would be included--scarcely are supportable in the light of the criticism Warren has written. His standards for judgment are not "too narrow," his method is not "too stiff and formal," his criticism is not "a contemporary variation of art-for-art's-sake doctrine."⁴ In their introduction to Understanding Poetry Warren and Brooks concluded that "the question of the value of poetry springs from a basic human impulse and fulfils a basic human interest."⁵ In 1957 Warren expressed what might be called his credo as a critic--that one must remain free from a particular bias, methodology, or even expectation:

. . . criticism is a perfectly natural human activity and somehow the dullest, most technical criticism is all, or nearly all, technical--meter, how to hang a line together--kitchen criticism, how to make the cake. People deeply interested in the art are interested in the "how": Now I don't mean to say that that is the only kind of valuable criticism. Any kind is good that gives a deeper insight into the nature of the thing--a Marxist analysis, a Freudian study, the history of a

¹Casper, Robert Penn Warren . . ., p. 82.

²David Daiches, Critical Approaches to Literature (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1956), p. 313.

³"Letter to a Teacher," Understanding Poetry (New York, 1938), p. ix.

⁴Darrel Abel, "Intellectual Criticism," American Scholar, XII (Autumn, 1943), 424. Mr. Abel, it seems to me, achieved a remarkable misunderstanding of the principles and values of new criticism when he asserted that "it may be said that the intellectual critics [he mentions Ransom, Tate and Brooks specifically] condemn all poetry which uses the poet's convictions to define experience, and which solicits emotional acceptance of the interpretation offered. What they want is a kind of viewpointless poetry, not a partial but a total representation" (p. 417).

⁵Understanding Poetry, p. 25.

theme. But we have to remember that there is no one, single, correct kind of criticism, no complete criticism. You only have different kinds of perspectives, giving, when successful, different kinds of insights.¹

Warren's interpretations of other writers in his Selected Essays (1958) reveal his catholicity as well as his high standards for the critic. In his brief preface he makes clear that his ten essays representing more than a decade and a half of his criticism, do not "aspire to represent a complete theory. . . ." As critics we must depend on "intelligence, tact, discipline, honesty, sensitivity." Warren's concern about dehumanizing, fragmenting effects of modern life, explicit with the Agrarians in the 1930's, appears again in a different context:

No, there is no complete criticism, and that, perhaps, is just as well. It is certainly just as well if we conceive a complete criticism as a sort of gigantic IBM machine--i.e., the "method"--into which deft fingers of filing clerks feed poems and plays and novels and stories, like punched cards. Who would punch the cards? Somebody has to punch them, if you have such a machine, and the hand that punches the cards rules the world.²

Warren is a Southern writer, but his "Southernness" infuses rather than embellishes his work. The artist has one main responsibility--"to make the most sense he can out of himself and out of his relation to other people, . . . to tell the truth."³ Warren expressed his truths out of what he "knew . . . well enough to write about"--life in the South. . . . Nothing else ever nagged you enough to stir the imagination."⁴

No important element of Southern life has failed to engage Warren's attention--and the race question is not excepted. But Warren deals with it, not in terms of absolutes or simple moral judgments but in the historical perspective of a Southerner and writer who has seen and experienced the problems of race as a "total symbolism for every kind of issue."⁵ In his conclusion to Segregation (1955), after traveling to parts of the South he had known best, Warren interviews himself; desegregation will come, he said, "when enough people, in a particular place, a particular county or state, cannot live with themselves any more. Or realize they don't have to."⁶ Speaking as a Southerner, he felt that, "If the South is really able to face up to itself and its situation, it may achieve identity, moral identity. Then in a country where moral identity is hard to come by, the South, because it has had to deal concretely with a moral problem, may offer some leadership. And we need any we can get."⁷

¹"The Art of Fiction, XVIII," p. 130.

²Selected Essays (New York, 1958), pp. xi-xii.

³The Creative Mind . . . and Method, interview, WGBH-FM, p. 23.

⁴"The Art of Fiction, XVIII," p. 120.

⁵Ibid., p. 135.

⁶Segregation, p. 113.

⁷Ibid., p. 115.

The high seriousness and artistic achievement of Warren's writing have been recognized with a variety of awards: in 1936, the year after the publication of his first book of poetry, Warren won the Helen Haire Levinson Prize from Poetry magazine, the Caroline Sinkler prize of the Poetry Society of South Carolina,¹ and the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship; in 1939, after the publication of Night Rider, he received his first Guggenheim Fellowship, followed by a second in 1946-47 after All the King's Men appeared. For this novel he also received the Pulitzer Prize and the Robert Meltzer Award of the Screenwriters Guild (1949).² In addition to the recognition already accorded for Promises, Warren was honored with the Millay Prize of the American Poetry Society in 1958. His little book, Segregation, was chosen for the Sidney Hillman award for journalism (1957). In 1959 he was one of three men selected for membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters.³

Warren's concern has been consistently to represent the individual, the qualities which make him different and human, and perhaps, thereby, to help to preserve a society which permits such differences to survive. So his fiction and drama, his poetry and criticism, reflecting a robustness and vigor in contrast to the colloquial or archaic elegance and restraint of Ransom's diction, embody a sense of life through the homely word, the inelegant expression, the concrete image. Reflected in a stanza of his poetry, a passage from a novel, or even a transcript of his conversation, is his peculiar gift of embodying an idea, evoking an emotion, or constructing a world. "People who can't read fiction"--among whom were certain kinds of "professional critic"--were objects of Warren's scorn: "The story of the Band [of Angels] wasn't an apology or an attack [concerning the plantation system]. It was simply trying to say something about something. God Almighty, you have to spell it out for some people, especially a certain breed of professional defender-of-the-good, who makes a career of holding the right thoughts and admiring his own moral navel."⁴

Warren wants, not a "world where everything is exactly alike and everybody is exactly alike," not a production-belt world, but a world of

. . . variety and pluralism--and appreciation. Appreciation in the context of some sort of justice and decency, and freedom of choice in conduct and personal life . . . a country in which there [is] a maximum

¹He also won the Caroline Sinkler Prize in 1937 and 1938.

²Although the film version of All the King's Men was made without the advice of Warren, it was recommended by him as having "intensity without tricks and pretensions, and always a sense of truth." Casper speculates that the award was made to Warren presumably "because the scenario borrowed heavily from the book for its dialogue." (Robert Penn Warren . . ., pp. 132-3.)

³Also elected to membership with Warren were Virgil Thomson and Eero Saarinen. Membership is limited to fifty men and women, chosen for special distinction from its parent body, the National Institute of Arts and Letters, which has two hundred fifty members.

⁴"The Art of Fiction, XVIII," pp. 124-25.

of opportunity for any individual to discover his talents and develop his capacities--discover his fullest self and by so doing learn to respect other selves a little.¹

So he has searched through the past and contemporary history; and has sought through experience--as he finds Faulkner has done--to

. . . take our [Southern] world, with its powerful sense of history, its tangled loyalties, its pains and tensions of transition, its pieties and violences, and [elevate] it to the level of a great moral drama on the tragic scale.²

For Warren this great drama is the consciousness of the human soul growing into the truth and self-realization of responsibility:

The recognition of the direction of fulfillment
is the death of the self
And the death of the self is the beginning of
selfhood.³

¹Ibid., pp. 136-37.

²"The First Peters Rushton Seminar in Contemporary Prose and Poetry," Sixteenth in the Series, March 13, 1951, University of Virginia, p. 15 (mimeographed).

³Brother to Dragons, pp. 214-5.

In 1924 Stark Young wrote for a character in his play The Colon-nade an observation that represented in essence Young's own aesthetic of art and life. John, a young poet from the South, observed:

You see we've already the dumb gray of abandoned farms, city sweat shops, back alleys, ashbarrels and disease. That's no more real than anything else. I don't want to decide that one thing is the reality in life and another isn't. I'd like to find a medium that was not afraid of warmth, beauty, that let all this have its chance as well as the drab and dismal, that is comic or tragic as you please, but glows, sings, darkens, dulls, as life does. I mean a realism that is so real and so precisely true and close that it becomes poetic, gives back their dream to things. What I mean is that the great point of art is to keep the life going in it, no matter what theory you follow. Everything moving in the stream of all life, but seen too with its own particular life in it.¹

Poet, dramatist and translator, critic of the theater and other arts, novelist, essayist and artist, Stark Young has reflected in all these facets of activity his conviction that art "should be nostalgic with all we love and follow after in life; but . . . it should have finally within it a calm and harmony as if it had arrived at a completeness in itself and its own peace."²

Young's background and career have done much to contribute to the development of an aesthetic that can be characterized in the words "nostalgic," "organic." The quintessence of life, like art, has been suggested, Young believes, in the symbol or more broadly, the image: "As a writer or artist, I must pause . . ." he wrote in his autobiography, "to think of the power of images in the shaping of life and character, of the divine privilege we have of significant actions, of figures of speech, that contain and express some quintessence of living."³

Although since 1915 Young has spent most of his life in New England or New York, he never abandoned his Southern tradition and heritage. Born in Como, Mississippi, in 1881, Stark Young was the son of a doctor, Alfred Alexander Young who had enlisted at the age of sixteen in Bedford Forrest's cavalry, and of Mary Stark who was related to the McGehees, many of whom became characters in Young's novels, stories, essays and plays.

The qualities of living which Young came to cherish were part of his experience as a child and adolescent: the family gatherings; the sense

¹Theatre Arts Monthly, VIII (August, 1924), 553.

²Young was quoted by Time on the occasion of his first one-man exhibit of paintings in 1943. The remark was addressed in particular to paintings, but it is applicable to his view of art generally.--"Stark Young, Painter," Time, XLI (June 14, 1943), 42.

³The Pavilion, pp. 27-28.

of belonging through identification with kin, one's "cud'ns"; the endless conversations and story-telling; the respect for tradition and order--characteristics he had singled out in a thematic passage of his first novel, Heaven Trees (1926): ". . . there stood an element of character . . . : certain obligations, certain codes, certain points of conscience and honor."¹ In a short story "Cousin Micajah," Young reminisced about his childhood: "By the time I was seven I felt myself one of a large clan who loved me. Growing up poor--we had all land and no money--I should have been surprised to hear anything but that we are born and die in some beloved air, and that the life of the affections is what we mean by life."²

Like that of Fletcher, Davidson, and Ransom, Young's education was not obtained in public school. As a child, he recalls, "The things that I heard and saw, and that my elders had seen and talked about, gave me the essential foundations of whatever education I may have acquired and whatever understanding of life or of art."³ He attended a private school at Oxford, Mississippi, and by the age of twelve, he records, he had studied nine subjects. It was a rambling, undirected, catch-as-catch-can type of informal way of learning, he said. At the age of fifteen, in 1896, he entered the University of Mississippi; he was graduated with a B.A., magna cum laude, in 1901. From Columbia University, where he came to know the eminent scholar of drama, Brander Matthews, Young received an M.A. in 1902.

For more than a decade the South was to be Young's academic locale. Returning to his native Mississippi, he taught English at the University from 1904 to 1907, then joined the faculty of the University of Texas where he was an instructor in English literature until 1910 and a professor of general literature until 1915.

His career in letters began with the publication of a book of poetry, The Blind Man at the Window and Other Poems (1906). Romantic in character, revealing the influence of Keats' Eve of St. Agnes and Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner, the collection gave promise of the tone and motifs that were to appear in his writing throughout his life. At the University of Texas his interest in the theater was reinforced with the founding and sponsorship of the all-male Curtain Club in 1908 and the direction of a number of plays, including The Two Angry Women of Abingdon, Ben Jonson's The Silent Woman, Molière's The Miser, and Regnard's Le Legataire Universel, which Young himself had translated.⁴ A move east to Amherst College, where he was a professor of English until 1921, brought him closer to New York and the theater, the focus of his career as a critic for nearly three decades. He resigned from Amherst, joined the editorial staff of the New Republic, and served as associate editor of the Theatre Arts Monthly from 1921 to 1924.

¹Heaven Trees (New York, 1926), p. 108.

²Feliciano (New York, 1935), p. 5.

³The Pavilion, p. 21.

⁴Young also established the Texas Review (which became the Southwest Review) but gave up the editorship after the first issue.

Young's career in and with the theater has been unique in this century. He was a critic different from any other writing about the Broadway scene; he was a dramatist and early in his career, a director; he was translator of plays none of which were then available in English--Machiavelli's La Mandragola (1928), Chekov's The Sea Gull (1939), The Cherry Orchard, and The Three Sisters (1950).

As dramatist Young has also turned to romantic themes, to fairy plays for children, to religious mysticism. Guenevere (1906), his first published play, retreats to the world of King Arthur and is marked by a romantic idealism that became, in various guises, the distinguishing motif of Young's point of view, often of a past world. Emotion, delicacy, gentility, a romanticism of tone were also reflected in some of his one-act plays, published six years later in a collection, Addio, Madretta, and Other Plays. The Colonnade (1924), foreshadowing the characters, situation, and themes of his first novel, Heaven Trees (1926), expresses the sense of identification with the South that Young revealed in his autobiography as part of his own being. Plans for a production by the Provincetown Players (with whom Young was connected) did not materialize, but the play was given abroad in Holland and London. "Eugene O'Neill," Young noted, "said it was an American Chekov."¹ Young's second full-length play, The Saint (1924), was, however, produced by the Greenwich Village Group; infused with nostalgia and a poetry of mysticism, the drama failed to elicit from critics an enthusiastic response. In the next two years, three other volumes of his plays were published: Sweet Times and the Blue Policeman: A Book of Plays to be Acted or Read by Children; The Twilight Saint: A Play in One Act; and Three One-Act Plays.

Young's interest in New York theater extended to directing. Among his Broadway ventures were Lenormand's The Failures (1923) directed for the Theatre Guild, O'Neill's Welded (1924), Moliere's George Dandin (which he had also translated). Critics, again, were not warm in their praise, although Ludwig Lewisohn was gratified to find that Young did not lose touch with reality in The Failures.²

But it is as a drama critic that Young is best known, and his personal involvement with the more "practical" or technical aspects of the theater undoubtedly contributed to the high quality and uniqueness of his New Republic drama reviews written between 1921 and 1947. His resignation from the staff came after "someone on the New Republic took to cutting and and rewriting his articles. . . ."³ That Young--a conservative in his

¹Letter, Stark Young to R. M. Lumianski, February 16, 1954, as quoted by Robert Lumianski, "Stark Young and His Dramatic Criticism" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation), Michigan State University, 1955, p. 55. Mr. Lumianski's study is not only a comprehensive treatment of Young's aesthetics and his criticism of actors and acting but also a useful biographical presentation.

²The Failures had twenty-four performances. Ludwig Lewisohn wrote of Young's directing: "There is humanity; there is precision." (Nation, XXVII [December 12, 1923], 692.)

³Eric Bentley, In Search of Theater (New York, 1953), p. 276. Bentley's treatment of Young as critic, characterized as "The China in the Bull

views of society and democracy--remained so long with a periodical noted for its liberal attitudes is an honor both to him and to the editor Herbert Croly, who had, said Young, "a profound understanding of the place of all the arts in our society and of the problems of critical writing." Young's long association with the New Republic was broken by one year as drama critic for the New York Times (1924-25). Temperamentally and intellectually unsuited for journalistic criticism, Young found that his articles did not prove popular--he made his readers uncomfortable, and other critics disliked his style which they regarded as overelaborate. Appreciation of searching evaluations and analyses required, he believed, a wide background and considerable knowledge, characteristics not found in the average newspaper reader.¹ Eric Bentley's appreciative critique of Young, suggests not only his limitations and his differences from other critics but also his special superior qualities:

Young is a Southerner and, by instinct . . . , an aristocrat. . . . He shares that blind animus against the whole world of liberalism. . . . It is a pity to be dead set against "problem plays" and "dramas of ideas" . . .² if these are almost the only intelligent plays going. On the other hand, what has given Young his special place among dramatic critics is precisely that he was never in the swim. . . . I, as a liberal and non-Southerner, can say much for a critic who goes to the Anouilh Antigone and writes . . . profound thoughts, but more remarkable is the innocence it takes to hand them on a platter to Broadway, the platter being the New Republic.

. . . It is this that sets him off not only from the tycoons but from the sophisticates.³

Shop," is thorough, balanced, and in the judgment of Davidson, "authoritative."

After Croly's death (1930), Young was made co-managing editor of the New Republic with Bruce Bliven, Robert Morss Lovett, George Soule, and Edmund Wilson.

Young's explanation for his resignation appears in his Preface to Immortal Shadows: ". . . after the death of Herbert Croly, . . . the editorial policy of the magazine gave less and less authority and concern to the arts in general, so that with the proper urging my articles got shorter and shorter. This state of things finally reached a climax where it was more than apparent that there would be neither room nor encouragement offered me for any article for any length that in my opinion would have done credit either to the paper or myself, not to speak of service to the theatre. I, therefore, resigned. . . ." [p. vii]

¹John Mason Brown, Upstage (New York, 1930), p. 244.

²Although he may not have been enthusiastic about much contemporary drama, they were not rejected solely on grounds of "ideas"; among his favorite plays, he noted in 1934, were Euripides' The Bacchae, Strindberg's The Father, Pirandello's Henry IV, Benavente's La Malquerida, and The Cherry Orchard, Le Misanthrope, and Hamlet. ". . . for the salty and basic English speech in some of the dialogue, I think Tobacco Road better than the whole of 'Mary of Scotland, . . .'" ("Pulitzer Prize Emotions," New Republic, LXXIX [May 30, 1934], 76.)

³Bentley, pp. 274-5.

Selections from his substantial, perceptive criticism have been issued in several volumes: The Flower in Drama: A Book of Papers on the Theatre (1923); Glamour: Essays on the Art of the Theatre (1925); Theatre Practice (1926); The Theater (1927); and his final collection of theater reviews from twenty-five years of writing, Immortal Shadows (1948). In the opinion of Bentley, Young's New Republic articles appearing in Immortal Shadows "contain some of the best theater criticism ever written in America or anywhere else. . . . These pieces represent a search for theatrical art in circumstances where theater was art less and less often. . . ."¹

Young's "art" as critic is not adequately characterized with noting the surface or more obvious qualities--his impressionistic, sometimes ecstatic reactions, his knowledge of history or geography, his ear for language or tone, his expertness in describing and judging acting, lighting, or setting--although all of these are distinctive elements of his criticism. Rather, the power and achievement of his artistry may be perceived--if explanation be not presumptuous to attempt for art--through an organic aesthetic. The more perfect the artistic expression, the more perfectly are the elements interwoven into an organic whole--the gesture to reveal the mood, or the tone of voice, even the pause or movement of the eyes to realize comic or tragic intention; the lighting or setting to impart violence or romanticism or decadence--whatever the lines, the actions, the theme combine to create. Yet Young did not reject propaganda in art; it had only--as any other element in a work--to be subsumed into an image wherein all the parts created a whole and the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. Irwin Shaw's Bury the Dead, wrote Young in 1936--

. . . presents the finest image that has appeared in our theatre this year. A great theatre image is when there is discovered something seen and done in which the central idea is completely expressed, and is revealed without effort, as if the creation had fully taken place already and were all exhibited. Not often in drama anywhere do we find so powerful an image as dominates the whole of "Bury the Dead." A myth is created, a veritable fable is established. . . . The idea and the tone, inseparable, are first and last the chief necessity in drama; the final need for its vitality is the discovery of a strong, full image for their conveyance.

. . . There can be no objection basically to art that is propaganda, but ultimately there is every objection to propaganda that is not art.²

George Bernard Shaw's Heartbreak House, on the other hand, was sharply criticized two years later:

Taking a work of art as a kind of biological whole, which is the only way it makes any sense, I should say that nothing Mr. Shaw presents in "Heartbreak House" to prove his case could be better evidence of the decay . . . of the English scene than this play itself is, with its lack of organic unity or exciting technique, its exhibitionistic self-

¹Ibid., p. 277.

²"The Great Doom's Image," New Republic, LXXXVII (May 13, 1936), 21.

assertion, its futile chatter in coquettish monotone about what the first bomb obliterates, or the first ism makes stale.¹

Throughout his career as theater critic, Stark Young's reviews have perfectly exemplified advice he offered recently in reminiscences and observations on the past and contemporary state of acting, plays and their production:

Often an actor in smaller parts would profit not so much from a friendly mention of what character he is playing, and a pat on the head, as he would from some close observation by a critic--some reminder of his perfect wearing of a costume, for instance, or make-up, or of an admirable speed in certain speech, or the sparkling staccato delivery of certain phrases. . . .

. . . The purpose of this little discussion, obviously, is not to ask the critic to crowd his column with technical terms, but only to ask that if he is going to write of a performance at all he might do well to look sharp and try to be as useful as possible (and more illuminating) to the people on the stage as well as to his readers.²

The aesthetics of Young's dramatic criticism has much in common with the principles of "new criticism" or the poetic practices of a modern Southern poet like Tate or Ransom--an organic unity captured through the rendering of the universal in the concrete, and thus realizing the good, the true, the beautiful in form. Art exists, not solely for its own sake, Young believed, but as an expression of society; again, his organic view of art is apparent:

The primary function of a society is not to produce art, though a primary function of art is to express that society. The function of its art is to re-create, emphasize, mold and perpetuate the qualities of a society, and bring it an antiphonal radiance drawn from among its own parts. The blest condition between a society and its art appears when they mutually sustain and nourish one another. And where art does arise, its necessity is to distill and shape in a society what there is to shape and distill, outwardly to achieve the definiteness of order and the mystery of form for what was hitherto wandering or in solution; and inwardly, like the evening star, in its immortal and intense suspension, to bring us back to the knees of life.³

The world to which Young as novelist and essayist brought his readers is most frequently the South--with its plantation culture or its values identified with or derived from an ante-bellum way of life. From his first novel, Heaven Trees (1926) to his fourth, So Red The Rose (1934),⁴ Young was constant in his focus on the family, on the dignity and code of an

¹"Heartbreak Houses," New Republic, XCV (June 8, 1938), 130-31.

²"The Art of Theatre Criticism," Harper's Magazine, CCXX (March, 1960), 30, 31.

³A Southern Treasury of Life and Literature (New York, 1937), p. viii.

⁴So Red the Rose has been translated into German, Danish, French and Italian.

aristocratic society, on the South and its traditions. Robert S. Lively notes in his study Fiction Fights the Civil War that Young's So Red the Rose, "despite its violence to the factual record of Natchez society, resurrected with loving sympathy the core of southern faith."¹ Young's second novel, The Torches Flare (1928) and his third, River House (1929) both represent the conflict between the older and the new generation Southerner. Davidson's comment about River House would be equally appropriate for The Torches Flare, a novel focused on a beautiful Mississippi actress, Lena Danridge. Her unhappy love affair, the conflict between values of an old and new generation, and discussions about art and life by Hal Boardman, Lena's childhood friend and persona for Young himself, constitute the motifs and material of the novel. Davidson praises Young: "He is not stricken with a contrary itching to deride or tempted to achieve a bitter or picturesque escape. He turns naturally to that humanity which forms the central body of society in the South, reports it fully, and treats it understandingly, with an eye for the finer shades of character and situation."² Like other novels by other Agrarians, So Red the Rose has been seen in terms of myth, of universals. And although Young himself disavowed a close connection with the Agrarians,³ nevertheless, in subject matter, in attitudes, and in theme his last novel is unmistakably "Agrarian." Davidson's characterization reveals the kinship:

The characters of So Red the Rose move upward toward the large conceptions of "myth," in the high sense, not downward toward the always arguable and provocative issues of "realism." They submit to the Aristotelean principle and can be viewed as universals. What we see, if we look closely enough, is not only the specific personal tragedy of the Bedfords and McGehees confronted by a clearly identifiable and historic soldier-leader, but the two parties of a great conflict recurrent in one form or another throughout human history, though brought to an intense pitch in modern times. One party integrates, in terms of a harmonious life that blends substance and spirit, subject to God's inscrutable will and the contingencies of nature; the other disintegrates and, using disintegration itself as a tool of power, presumes to mount beyond good and evil and to make human intelligence a quasi-God.⁴

Collections of Young's essays as well as his stories and sketches reflect many themes and much of the subject matter of the drama and criticism. These represent, however, other locales, other cultures, other subjects, but their treatment again reveals a successful integration of

¹p. 166. ²"Trend in Literature," Culture in the South, pp. 206-7.

³To the editors of Shenandoah, Young wrote after the issue on contemporary views of the Agrarians was published: "I'll Take My Stand never pulled together or quite came off." ("Communications," Shenandoah, III (Autumn, 1952), 39. Two years later in a personal letter to R. M. Lumianski Young was more explicit; he was not, he said, especially sympathetic with the Agrarian effort and "never had any dealings otherwise with the movement." (June 24, 1954 -- quoted in "Stark Young and His Dramatic Criticism," p. 79.)

⁴"Theme and Method in So Red the Rose," Southern Renaissance, pp. 276-7.

disparate materials. Two volumes of essays appeared before the Agrarian symposium: The Three Fountains (1924) and Encaustics (1926). The second collection, from New Republic sketches, ranged freely from Texas to Italy, from such subjects as art, and education, to coquetry, and religion. The title "Encaustics," said Young "popped into my head, for one reason or another. . . . Encaustic painting in the antique world was done with melted wax and certain burning processes. The sound 'caustic' also, doubtless, suggested a rather tart accent and edge. From the two motifs must have come my use of the term."¹ Young was sharp and gentle, caustic and ironic, a Southerner, artist, and man of the world. Modern educational attitudes were ironically dealt with in "Citizen Tom," a sketch of a young boy who left a New England college to study in a theater school and "President C--," who seemed like "a platitude at prayer," a believer in fraternities, athletics, popularity, and citizenship. Young asks him:

"But suppose . . . Tom never wanted to be one of those college men? Why distort what he is, to be like others? There must be a man now and then who learns little from fraternity life. . . . why not grant men who may be different their own kind of thing? . . . What's the use of learning to live among men if you can't live with yourself?"

. . . . I thought of the colleges, with their muddled aims, their exhorting grades, their rules, degrees and prizes to keep the thing going. I thought of those bored groups of men around fraternity house fires. . . --how little it connected with the life of the mind, with the life of human thought! Some of these college men study, some love learning, some find stimulation in a handful of professors who are hated by the faculty at large. But all are encouraged by the dean, the alumni, the fraternities and the class spirit, to hold college offices, to be leaders with buttons and pennants, to compete, to fill the time.²

Stories and sketches in The Street of the Islands (1930) and Feliciano (1935) represent similarities, contrasts, and clashes between Mexican, Italian, and Anglo-Saxon cultures. Writing of an Italian countess from a New York family, Young imagines how his Southern cousin would have fitted into the life in campagna--in filleggiatura--far more satisfactorily:

The count's family would have been devoted to her; I can see her now throwing her arms around some of those old aunts or uncles or grandmothers, and recognizing in them not a few of the same traditions on which she herself had been brought up. She could bear a crack in the plaster or a chip in the paint. . . . She would have understood . . . that life, if it is to last, has a social scheme, has certain hard restrictions and finalities and orders, within which flourish all those affections, family loyalties, and uneventful times together that Southern people know the value of.³

¹"The Green Room," Virginia Quarterly Review, XI (April, 1935),

²New Republic, XXXIII (December 27, 1922), 123-24.

³"Sette Frati," Feliciano, pp. 223-24.

To an old, cultured Italian, a Monsignore of the Church, Young speaks of a young American who is "careering":

Very likely we have the honor to kill, yes, to take the life out of more human things than any race in history. Look at Christmas, which we have turned, with advertising and business enterprise and restless imitation, from what was once an old sweet season into a general dread or horror or jazzed exhaustion. Or Easter, killed with sentimental publicity and florists' pushing. . . . And all the delicate things, infinitely human, infinitely deep and intangible, old in the race, exploited. The hospital, the undertaker's art, often pragmatic evasions of bitter fact, have taken the sting out of age and death. Death means nothing, life means nothing, passion itself is as safe, flat, and familiar as the ladies' underwear everywhere in shop windows. Great popular doctrines handle life for us, we have learned to spare ourselves the cost of what we never had.¹

Young, clearly, was a social as well as a dramatic critic, but his views appeared in reviews of books, in travel sketches, in evaluations of art and sculpture or dramatic performances rather than in essays concerned with social, economic, or political issues. His attitude toward slavery, for example, disclosed in a review of two books on the plantation South, parallels expressions by other Agrarians:

A Jacksonian democracy arrived. The most illuminating section of the book is this record of how an aristocratic section that freely admitted the evils of slavery was outvoted by a democratic section whose political leaders denied any imperfections in the institution. In a way this is a forerunner of the solid South that we all know of. . . . It meant a defense, sometimes half-false of slavery which culminated in political impasses and which put some of the best minds in the South at a disadvantage. They tried to justify from outside attack what they themselves did not quite endorse.²

In 1931 Young traveled in Italy where he gave lectures under the auspices of the Westinghouse Foundation. Speaking in Italian at universities and before philosophical societies on economic and cultural aspects of American life, industrialism, American art, the theater, theatrical decor, fiction, and architecture, Young was awarded by the King the highest title in the Order of the Crown: Commendatore.³ Articles recording impressions of Italy under Fascism appeared in the New Republic and recently Young returned to his notebooks of 1931 to publish some impressions he had noted after his visit with Mussolini. Young asked Mussolini why the Italians so frequently "knock" their own country--complaining about bad roads and poor hotels. Mussolini, he wrote, calls up the Bureau of Tourism and issues an order that such things are to stop at once. Young muses about his "first experience of complete autocracy. Even if somewhat dramatized doubtless.

¹"Echoes at Livorno," ibid., p. 207.

²"Two Slavery Books," New Republic, LXXIX (May 23, 1934), 48.

³Letter to R. M. Lumianski, January 29, 1954, in "Stark Young and His Dramatic Criticism," p. 81.

Autocracy." His comparison with democracy is interesting in the light of subsequent history and the views he had represented in his fiction and criticism:

For the moment now, nevertheless, at the sight of how this taking an entire bureau of a nation by the neck like that might get results, I felt more sympathetic toward a sentence about democracy that I had learned years ago: "It is a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike. Even horses and asses have a way of marching along with all the rights and dignities of freemen . . . and everything is ready to burst with liberty."¹

His judgment of Mussolini was ambivalent:

It is no secret the amount of black ambitious, ruthless force, violence, and torture that could be related in one way or another to him. But so also could the bold new laws, the reforms in public services, civic reorganizations and the many other fields brought about through his administration. . . . And meanwhile you knew very well that in time the almost inevitable destiny of tyrants will close down on him. . . . But there is one fact that living teaches us, which is that a man's mind, or personality . . . is made up of compartments; and it does not follow that because one compartment has what we must fear and despise, the same is true of another compartment. The recognition of this fact makes certain friendships far less complicated than they might otherwise be.²

A few years before his resignation as drama critic, Young turned to a more direct form as an expression of his aesthetics. In 1943, after two years of self-study, his paintings were exhibited in a one-man show as a benefit for the Friends of Greece, Inc. Critics found in his canvases, particularly his flower studies, evidence of his love of nature as well as of art. A New York Times critic wrote: "The imaginatively wrought fantasies . . . are irradiated with a revealing and yet eluding, an always haunting and intensely personal mysticism."³ The Time critic concentrated on more peripheral matters: "Florid, balding, loquacious Stark Young," he wrote, "takes a view of art which is winning to those tired of abstruse and cerebral esthetics." Young's love of literature and history, he notes, is, "somewhat fruitily evident in his precious titles and subtitles."⁴ A second showing of later paintings followed in 1945. On the occasion of his last publication of theater criticism, Time magazine observed that Young

¹"From a Notebook: Italy," The Texas Quarterly, I (February, 1958), 70.

²Ibid., 71

³"Local Shows," May 23, 1943, Section II, 10, col. 3.

⁴"Stark Young, Painter," June 14, 1943, p. 42.

"has labored in virtually all the artistic vineyards that might attract a courtly, sensitive Southern gentleman."¹

In an interview with New York Herald Tribune critic, John Hutchens, Young spoke of his views on the modern novel, his own So Red the Rose, and his satisfaction with his autobiography, The Pavilion (1951). For the past two years, he said, this book was "burning me up," with the result that he had done no painting--"although I really think that I was born to paint, not write."²

Young's long career as a man of letters has been devoted to embodying the elusive in form. For him the function of art "is to extend life into dream; since reality, for all its being so close at hand, is beyond us . . . the actuality of real things has no solidity as compared to the reality of our illusions and the precision of our emotions."³ For him "the very last and ultimate flowing of all human experience is its sharing and revelation." In this Young has succeeded admirably.

¹"Farewell Appearance," December 13, 1948.

²"On the Books--On the Authors," New Herald Tribune Book Reviews, September 30, 1951, p. 2.

³The Pavilion, p. 187.

APPENDIX C

The Scopes Trial

To give a detailed account of the Scopes trial, its outcome, and its significance seems scarcely necessary, so thoroughly was it covered at the time and so familiar has it recently become again as a result of its dramatic romantic treatment in Inherit the Wind. There are, however, several details and ironies omitted from the general accounts that are of particular interest in this context. The Tennessee anti-evolution bill (introduced by a farmer, Representative Butler, who was seriously disturbed by heretical modernism being taught children in state-supported schools) went through the legislature and was signed by Governor Austin Peay, to the great astonishment of liberal legislators and educators. Its passage was, in part, the result of political logrolling. Members of the House regarded it as a joke; Senators--after sharp argument and not wishing to commit political suicide--on March 13, 1925, sent it to the Governor, convinced that he would veto it; and the Governor, hoping to get his liberal program through, especially a bill to increase the length of the school term to eight months and to grant larger appropriations for higher education, signed it, appending a statement that he doubted that the law would ever be tested. Legally, then, the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution was prohibited in all public schools, normal colleges and state-supported universities of Tennessee. To mollify the conservatives, the Governor declared, "It is the opinion of many that the abandonment of the old-fashioned faith and belief in the Bible is our trouble in large degree. It is my own belief. . . . I do not hesitate to approve the bill."

Unfortunately for the reputation of Tennessee, the law was tested. Two attorneys, Sue K. Hicks and Wallace Haggard, and a chemical engineer, Dr. George Rappleyea, planned with high school teacher John Scopes that he be indicted under the law since he could show that Civic Biology, the text he was permitted to use by the State Board of Education, mentioned the theory of evolution.

With Governor Peay's signature, the bill became law on March 18, 1925. Scopes' trial opened July 10 in a glare of national publicity and an invasion of fanatics, promoters, and the curious. Had the lawyers not been so famous, the interest undoubtedly would have dissipated. But "Cross of Gold" William Jennings Bryan, who--unfortunately for the reputation of the Fundamentalists--rested his position on ignorance of scholarship, even Biblical--and Clarence Darrow, already recognized as a lawyer willing to take, and able to win, the most unlikely cases, were too prominent nationally to be ignored. There was only one Southerner among the defense counsel, John R. Neal, formerly Professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Tennessee, ousted in 1923 because of a faculty disturbance alleged to have started over the banning of James Harvey Robinson's The Mind in the Making. Largely because of the reputations of the lawyers and the representation of the case in the national press, the issue became in the devout as well as in the popular, uncritical mind, religious faith vs. science and/or atheism; for the more sophisticated and liberal it was an attack on academic freedom. This interpretation was scarcely to be avoided with the financial and moral support of the American Civil Liberties Union, which entered the case when Rappleyea signed a contract with the Union

granting it control of the defense. For Tennesseans with a loyalty to their state and to the laws that governed it, the trial would have been better understood had it been treated as a social problem created because fundamentalists--generally "men of strong beliefs . . . and a great desire to have their wishes respected by their politicians"--were genuinely convinced that their children were being compelled to learn about a doctrine that denied the Scriptural account of the creation of man: as they reasoned, to contradict Genesis was to reject God. Authors of the Federal Writers Guide to Tennessee, with the perspective of a decade, declared that the ultimate issue of the conflict ". . . was a struggle between those who conceived a democratic education as purely and wholly a state function and those who were doubtful of the state's capacity to assume a complete control. . . ." [p. 126]

Symbolized in a token fine of \$100, afterwards set aside by the State Supreme Court on a technicality--the result was a legal victory for the Fundamentalists but a moral triumph for the defense. Science books had to be revised--generally the word "development" was substituted for "evolution"; and even though the law remained on the books (since the State Supreme Court had avoided a clear answer on its constitutionality), teachers of science in colleges circumvented the law which gradually fell into disuse. Three years after the trial, a contributor to Harper's reported: "I found the frowning bastion of religious intolerance a good deal of a joke even to its ostensible defenders. . . . The deluge of orders and requests for evolutionary works at Tennessee bookshops and public libraries is only now beginning to decline."¹

But the South thereafter--at least the Fundamentalist South--was depicted as a mass of ignorance, superstition, and bigotry. Northern and critical Southern journalists made the most of disparaging evidence, noting that seven professors at the University of Tennessee had been summarily dismissed after the Anti-Evolution bill became law; that the sister of John Scopes lost her job teaching mathematics in Paducah, Kentucky, because she refused to affirm her disbelief in evolution; that at several state-supported universities in the South courses in philosophy were coupled with classes in religious education, Epworth League methods, and interpretation of the religions of mankind--all taught by Baptist or Methodist preachers; that in one city of more than 200,000, ministers succeeded in closing moving picture theaters on Sunday, despite newspaper protests--and that this action was upheld in an ensuing election; that in another city a fanatic evangelical preacher shot and killed a highly educated priest and was granted mercy by a jury on the basis of his plea that the priest was trying to convert his daughter.²

¹Duncan Aikman, "Not Quite So Standardized Yet," Harper's Monthly Magazine, CLVII (September, 1928), 510.

²The above account was derived from the following sources: Orland K. Armstrong, "Bootleg Science in Tennessee," North American Review, CCXXVII (February, 1929), 138-142; Clarence Cason, "Is the South Advancing?" Yale Review, XX (Spring, 1931), 506-7; Rollin Lynde Hartt, "What Lies Beyond Dayton?" Nation, CXXI (July 22, 1925), 111; Joseph Wood Krutch, "Darrow vs. Bryan," ibid., (July 29, 1925), 126-7; Krutch, "Tennessee: Where Cowards Rule," ibid., (July 15, 1925), 88-89; George Fort Milton, "Can Minds Be Closed by Statute?" 323-28; "Saving Genesis," Nation, CXXI (July 15, 1925), 87; Tennessee: A Guide to the State, pp. 125-126.

APPENDIX D

A LIST OF REVIEWS, ARTICLES, AND BOOKS BY THE AGRARIANS RELEVANT TO AGRARIANISM AND THE SOUTH: 1931-1939

A Note: To indicate the character, quantity, and sources of the publication activity of the Agrarians, the following comprehensive but by no means complete list of works is offered in chronological order. In general, articles of literary criticism have been omitted as have titles of individual poems and short stories. Names of periodicals will be abbreviated as follows:

<u>AAA</u>	<u>Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</u>	<u>NYHTB</u>	<u>New York Herald Tribune Books</u>
<u>AR</u>	<u>American Review</u>	<u>P</u>	<u>Poetry</u>
<u>AS</u>	<u>American Scholar</u>	<u>PR</u>	<u>Partisan Review</u>
<u>B</u>	<u>Bookman</u>	<u>RevP</u>	<u>Review of Politics</u>
<u>HGM</u>	<u>Harvard Graduate Magazine</u>	<u>ScM</u>	<u>Scribner's Magazine</u>
<u>HH</u>	<u>Hound and Horn</u>	<u>SeR</u>	<u>Sewanee Review</u>
<u>HM</u>	<u>Harper's Magazine</u>	<u>SF</u>	<u>Social Forces</u>
<u>JoSH</u>	<u>Journal of Southern History</u>	<u>SoR</u>	<u>Southern Review</u>
<u>KR</u>	<u>Kenyon Review</u>	<u>SoWR</u>	<u>Southwest Review</u>
<u>N</u>	<u>Nation</u>	<u>SRL</u>	<u>Saturday Review of Literature</u>
<u>NMQ</u>	<u>New Mexico Quarterly</u>	<u>Symp</u>	<u>Symposium</u>
<u>NR</u>	<u>New Republic</u>	<u>VQR</u>	<u>Virginia Quarterly Review</u>
		<u>YR</u>	<u>Yale Review</u>

The following abbreviations are used to indicate the subsequent appearance of articles in collections:

<u>AL</u>	<u>The Attack on Leviathan</u>
<u>FA</u>	<u>Free America</u>
<u>RE</u>	<u>Reactionary Essays</u>
<u>WB</u>	<u>The World's Body</u>
<u>WOA</u>	<u>Who Owns America?</u>

1931Books

Lytle, Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company.
Owsley, King Cotton Diplomacy.

Articles and Reviews

Nixon, "Changing Political Philosophy of the South," AAA (January).
_____, "De Bow's Review," SeR (January-March).
Tate, "The Two Horsemen," VQR (January).
_____, "Irony and Humility," HH (January-March).
Wade, "The South and Its Fiction," VQR (January).

Tate, "The Reign of Terror," NR (February 18).

Warren, "The Gamecock," NR (March 25).

Nixon, "The Conscious South," SeR (April-June).
Warren, "The Second American Revolution," VQR (April).

Davidson, "Criticism Outside New York," B (May).

Lytle, "Life in the Cotton Belt," NR (June 3).

Davidson, "The Expectancy of Doom," VQR (July).

Warren, "Lavender and Old Ladies," NR (August 5).

Young, "What Dotage Will Not Vanity Maintain?" NR (September 16).

Lytle, "The Lincoln Myth," VQR (October).
Young, "The Shadow of Wings," NR (October 14).

Tate, "A Mississippi Dreiser," N (December 2).
_____, "Regionalism and Sectionalism," NR (December 23).

1932Articles and Reviews

Warren, "Not Local Color," VQR (January).
Davidson, "Meeting of Southern Writers," B (January).
Wade, "Joel Chandler Harris," VQR (January).
Young, "Parallels in Italy," VQR (January).

Ransom, "The State and the Land," NR (February 17).
Young, "My Aunt Lavinia and the Faculty," NR (February 17).
Warren, "Two Poets," NR (February 24).
Young, "History and Mystery," NR (February 24).

Tate, "New England Culture and Emily Dickinson," Symp (April)
 Warren, "A Georgian Laureate," P (April).

Davidson, "The Southern Poet and His Tradition," P (May)[in AL].
 Tate, "Editorial Note," P (May).
 Warren, "A Note on Three Southern Poets," P (May).
 Tate, "There Ought To Be a Law," NR (May 4).

Tate, "Not Fear of God," NR (June 1).

Tate, "Hart Crane," HH (Summer)[in RE].

Tate, "Hart Crane and the American Mind," P (July)[in RE].
 Ransom, "Land!," HM (July).

Tate, "The Cornfield Journalists," NR (August 3).
 _____, "The Prophet of Secession," NR (August 17).
 Young, "Deep Southern Notes III: Rosedown Reflections," NR (August 17).

Nixon, "Changing Background of Southern Politics," SF (October).

Tate, "Laundry Bills," P (November).

1933

Articles and Reviews

Fletcher, "Three Fables," VQR (January).
 Tate, "The Whole Image of Man," HH (January-March).

Lytle, "A Tactical Blunder," VQR (April).
 Davidson, "The Rise of the American City," AR (April).
 Wade, "Profits and Losses in the Life of Joel Chandler Harris," AR
 (April).
 Young, "Gabriel's Horn," NR (April 19).

Davidson, "Agrarianism for Commuters," AR (May).
 Fletcher, "A Poet of Courage," P (May).
 Ransom, "A Poem Nearly Anonymous," AR (May)[in WB].
 Tate, "Unemployment--A Modest Proposal," AR (May).
 Lytle, "A Confederate General," NR (May 31).

Owsley, "Scottsboro, the Third Crusade," AR (June).
 Young, "Preface to Distinction," NR (June 7).
 _____, "Summer Niceties," NR (June 28).
 Davidson, "Sectionalism in America," HH (Summer).

Tate, "Poetry and Politics," NR (August 2).
 _____, "A Southern Romantic," NR (August 30).

Fletcher, "Section Versus State," AR (September).
 Lytle, "The Backwoods Progression," AR (September).

Ransom, "Forms and Citizens," AR (September).
 _____, "The Poet and His Tradition," AR (September).

Ransom, "Happy Farmers," AR (October).
 Fletcher, "The Land of Enchantment," P (October).

Tate, "Reply to Mr. Starke," NR (November 1).
 Warren, "The Blind Poet: Sidney Lanier," AR (November).
 Davidson, "Still Rebels, Still Yankees," AR (November, December) [in AL].

Ransom, "A Capital for the New Deal," AR (December).
 Tate, "Where Are the People?" AR (December).
 Young, "Roads," NR (December 20).
 _____, "The Man of the Renaissance," NR (December 27).

1934

Books

Young, So Red the Rose.

Articles and Reviews

Culture in the South, ed. W. T. Couch.
 Davidson, "Trend in Literature."
 Nixon, "Colleges and Universities."
 Wade, "Southern Humor."

Ransom, "The Aesthetic of Regionalism," AR (January).
 Wade, "Southern Fiction Catches Up," VQR (January).
 Young, "Toward a Theatre Art," NR (January 3).

Warren, "T. S. Stribling: A Paragraph in the History of Critical Realism," AR (February).
 Davidson, "The Dilemma of the Southern Liberals," AM (February).
 Tate, "A View of the Whole South," AR (February).
 Young, "The Joyous Season," NR (February 14).
 Tate, "John Peale Bishop's Poems," NR (February 21) [in RE].

Davidson, "The English Teacher and the Lost Humanities," HGM (March).
 Ransom, "Hearts and Heads," AR (March).
 Warren, "Working Toward Freedom," P (March).
 Tate, "Three Types of Poetry," NR (March 14, 28, April 11).

Davidson, "The Restoration of the Farmer," AR (April).
 _____, "The Sacred Harp in the Land of Eden," VQR (April) [in AL].
 Tate, "Spengler's Tract Against Liberalism," AR (April).
 _____, "Where Singing Line of Blue and Grey Meet," NYHTB (April 8).
 _____, "Gettysburg," N (April 11).
 Young, "Roll, Jordan Roll," NR (April 25).

Ransom, "A Note in Ontology," AR (May) [in WB].
 Warren, "Twelve Poets," AR (May).

Tate, "Lee and His Biographers," N (May 2).
 Young, "Two Slavery Books," NR (May 23).
 _____, "Pulitzer Prize Emotions," NR (May 30).

Davidson, "A Novel in Verse," AR (June).
 Fletcher, "Dewey's Latest Disciple," AR (June).
 Tate, "T. S. Stripling," N (June 20)

Fletcher, "Regionalism and the Folk Art," SoWR (July).
 Young, Texas Lights II: Summer Science," NR (July 11).

Ransom, "Poets without Laurels," YR (Autumn) [in WB].

Davidson, "A Case in Farming," AR (September).
 Lytle, "John Taylor and the Political Economy of Agriculture," AR (September, October, December).

Davidson, "Where Regionalism and Sectionalism Meet," SF (October).
 _____, "Lands that Were Golden," AR (October, November).
 Owsley, "The War of the Sections," VQR (October).
 Wade, "Two Souths," VQR (October).

Ransom, "Sociology and the Black Belt," AR (December).
 Tate, "The Definitive Lee," NR (December 19).

1935

Books

Fletcher, XXXIV Elegies.
 Warren, Thirty-six Poems.
 Young, Feliciania.

Articles and Reviews

Nixon, "The New South and the Old Crop (1865-80)," in Essays in Honor of William E. Dodd, ed. Avery Craven.

Davidson, "Regionalism and Education," AR (January).
 Fletcher, "A Century of Progress," AR (January).
 _____, "Kentucky Georgics," P (January).
 Owsley, "The American Triangle," VQR (January).
 Warren, "John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony," VQR (January).
 _____, "The Fiction of Caroline Gordon," SoWR, Book Supplement (January).
 Ransom, "Mr. Pound and the Broken Tradition," SRL (January 19).

Fletcher, "The American Dream," P (February).
 _____, "Ruskin," AR (February).
 Owsley, "The Soldier Who Walked with God," AR (February, April).

Davidson, "The Returning Frontier," AR (March).
 Fletcher, "The Stieglitz Spoof," AR (March).
 Owsley, "The Pillars of Agrarianism," AR (March).

Ransom, "Poets without Laurels," YR (March)[in WB].
 Tate, "Center of the Language," N (March 20).

Davidson, "The First Agrarian Economist," AR (April).
 _____, "Regionalism and Nationalism in American Literature," AR
 (April)[in AL].

Ransom, "Modern with the Southern Accent," VQR (April).
 Tate, "The Profession of Letters in the South," VQR (April)[in RE].
 Wade, "Old Wine in a New Bottle," VQR (April).
 Young, "Encaustics for Southerners," VQR (April).
 Tate, "R. E. Lee Complete," NR (April 10).

Davidson, "The Innocent at Home," AR (May).
 Fletcher, "An Aesthetic Humanist," AR (May).
 _____, "Is Folk Art Property?," NMQ (May).
 Lytle, "The Irrepressible Conflict," AR (May).
 Warren, "A Note on the Hamlet of Thomas Wolfe," AR (May).

Davidson, "I'll Take My Stand: A History," AR (Summer).
 Fletcher, "A Stone of Stumbling," AR (Summer).
 Owsley, "The Historical Philosophy of Frederick Jackson Turner," AR
 (Summer).
 Ransom, "The Cathartic Principle," AR (Summer)[in WB].

Lytle, Review of Follow the Furies, SoR (July).
 Owsley, "Abolition and Secession," VQR (July).
 Wade, "Prodigal: an Essay on Thomas Wolfe," SoR (July).
 Young, "Mountain People," NR (July 31).

Davidson, "White Spirituals: The Choral Music of the South," AS
 (Autumn).
 Lytle, "Robert E. Lee," SoR (Autumn).
 Ransom, "The Tense of Poetry," SoR (Autumn)[in WB].
 Tate, "Mr. Burke and the Historical Environment," SoR (Autumn).
 _____, "A Note on Bishop's Poetry," SoR (Autumn)[in RE].

Young, "Kind Hearts Are More," NR (August 7).
 Ransom, "Thomism and Esthetic Experience," SRL (August 31).

Owsley, "Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar," AR (September).

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APPENDIX E

The Issue of Fascism and the Agrarians, 1940-1950

The award of the Bollingen prize to Ezra Pound in 1949--although he had been an admirer of Mussolini and had aided the Fascist government while the United States was at war with Italy--was cause for a violent controversy which erupted in the pages of the Saturday Review of Literature when the editorial board and Robert Hillyer (himself a poet) condemned the decision of the Fellows in American Letters of the Library of Congress who were, he said, dominated by the Eliot-New Critics group.¹ Censuring Poetry's comment on Pound--"nothing is more understandable than that he should have adopted a rather cross attitude toward the United States," Hillyer declared, "I will ask the reader to consider the childish frivolousness of such comment on the Bollingen Award at a time when the clouds of the new Fascism and the new aestheticism have perceptibly met in that award."² Hillyer modified the innuendo and made more explicit the danger he felt such a decision symbolized:

I do not . . . accuse the jury as a whole or any member in particular of totalitarian or anti-democratic convictions. Some of them simply yielded to conformity. . . . When I began the research for these articles I was quite unaware how deviously the trails would lead me toward one concept: totalitarianism. It is not genteel authoritarianism or the desire for order in a disordered world, as polite critics have called it. It is the mystical and cultural preparation for a new authoritarianism.³

The attack on the Fellows' decision and thus even on the Library of Congress itself was sharply answered by Librarian Luther H. Evans: "In my many years of study and teaching in the field of political science I came to regard a political test for art and poetry as a sign of dictatorial, illiberal, and undemocratic approach to matters of the mind."⁴

¹See Norman Cousins and Harrison Smith, "Ezra Pound and the Bollingen Award," XXXII (June 11, 1949), 20-21; and Robert Hillyer, "Treason's Strange Fruit," ibid., pp. 9-11, 28, and "Poetry's New Priesthood," ibid., June 18, 1949, pp. 7-9, 38. In addition to the Agrarians, Tate and Warren, the Fellows of the Library of Congress included T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Conrad Aiken, Louise Bogan, Paul Green, Robert Lowell, Katherine Anne Porter, Willard Thorp, Leonie Adams, and Katherine Garrison Chapin. After the controversy had continued for more than a month (the flood of letters to the editor was enormous), a letter of protest signed by all the Fellows except Paul Green was published in the Saturday Review of Literature. The group wrote: ". . . the decision . . . was arrived at wholly by democratic procedure. We indignantly protest the impugment . . . of the integrity of the motive of any of the Fellows." ("More on Pound," XXXII [July 30, 1949], 22.)

²"Poetry's New Priesthood," p. 8.

³Ibid., p. 38.

⁴"A Letter from the Librarian of Congress," ibid., July 2, 1949, p. 22.

But even his admission that he had no high regard for either Pound's view of life or his poetry did not mollify the editors of the Saturday Review of Literature:

. . . while one must divorce politics from art, it is quite another matter to use the world "politics" as a substitute for values. We do not believe, in short, that art has nothing to do with values. We do not believe that what a poet says is necessarily of lesser importance than the way he says it. We do not believe that a poet can shatter ethics and still be a good poet. We do not believe that poetry can convert words into maggots that eat at human dignity and still be good poetry. We do not believe that the highest function of art is to deny and corrupt the values which make art possible.¹

John Gould Fletcher, although not a Fellow of the Library of Congress, followed the controversy with a good deal of interest. Surprisingly enough, he supported the position taken by the Saturday Review editors rather than that taken by Tate and the majority of Fellows; the "Pisan Cantos," he agreed, are "very bad poetry, defaced with scurrility and anti-Semitism":

One cannot--as the so-called new critics would have us do--separate the esthetic effect of a poem from its relation to men in human society. It is this notion, as set forth by the Fellows of the Library of Congress, that invalidates modern poetry as a vital touchstone of human experience, and makes of this award a mockery at the outset.²

The ideas of certain of the Southern Agrarian critics were identified with those of T. S. Eliot by a scholar, Professor Rossell Hope Robbins, who found in Eliot's work elements of anti-Semitism, "limited sympathy, amounting to a contempt for humanity," and "intransigent religious and political opinions." "The political position of the Southern Agrarians," Professor Robbins declared, "no less than that of Eliot, would have less respect among the mass of democratic Americans were it better known." Robbins, too, objected to the awarding of the Bollingen prize to Pound and charged that "the Southern scholars have fastened an octopus hold on the American academic and literary world."³

The discussion also appeared in other journals, notably the Partisan Review where statements by William Barrett, several Fellows of the Library of Congress, and other critics were published concurrently with debates in the Saturday Review of Literature. Despite personal reasons which would have deterred him from voting for Pound, Tate did so, he wrote, because

. . . the specific task of a man of letters is to attend to the health of society not at large but through literature, . . . [to] be

¹"A Reply to Mr. Evans," ibid.

²Letter, ibid., July 9, 1949, p. 24.

³The T. S. Eliot Myth (New York, 1951), pp. 18-26, 187-193.

constantly aware of the condition of language in his age. As a result of observing Pound's use of language in the past thirty years, I had become convinced that he had done more than any other man to regenerate the language, if not the imaginative forms, of English verse. I had to face the disagreeable fact that he had done this even in passages of verse in which the opinions ranged from the childish to the detestable.¹

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to examine closely the assertion that the aesthetic convictions of the New Critics (and Tate, Ransom, and Warren would be included) implied an anti-democratic, anti-liberal political and social view, mention should at least be made of two articles which bear some relevance to the continued discussion of fascism charges against the Agrarians. Robert B. Heilman in his review of Warren's All the King's Men contended that those who hold strong liberal-democratic-progressive convictions are rendered incapable of appreciating imaginative tragic literature; that modern readers approach such works from habits that might be described as "the Puritanical, the sentimental, the scientific, the social, topical, and the lotos eating or slothful."²

Against the background of this argument Robert Gorham Davis maintained several years later in "The New Criticism and the Democratic Tradition," that "over the last two decades in the journals of the New Criticism, authority, hierarchy, catholicism, aristocracy, tradition, absolutes, dogma, truths became related terms of honor, and liberalism, naturalism, scientism, individualism, equalitarianism, progress, protestantism, pragmatism, and personality became related terms of rejection and contempt."³ He found evidence for this complex of relationships in I'll Take My Stand, Who Owns America?, in the "reactionary" criticism of Allen Tate and Yvor Winters, in Ransom's God Without Thunder, in the files of the Southern quarterlies, in Eliot's Criterion, and "especially in Seward Collins' Catholic-distributivist American Review for which G. R. Elliot, Donald Davidson, Norman Foerster, Yvor Winters, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate, Mark Van Doren, and Austin Warren continued to write, even after it became openly pro-France and pro-fascist."⁴ Furious at the assertions of Davis' article, which he called a disgrace to the American Scholar, to Phi Beta Kappa, and to American scholarship, Winters denied that the new critics were to be described even as potential fascists. He defended Tate's use of "reactionary" as a general term used in opposition to "certain contemporary social and philosophical ideas in favor of older ones; but that there was anything fascistic about his 'reactions' I have yet to discover." As for the contributors to the American Review, "few of them were fascists: Tate and his Agrarian friends . . . were in my opinion fantastists but were certainly not fascists."⁵

¹"Ezra Pound and the Bollingen Prize," The Man of Letters in the Modern World, p. 266. This article first appeared in the June, 1949, Partisan Review, pp. 666-68.

²"Melpomene as Wallflower; or the Reading of Tragedy," Sewanee Review, LV (Winter, 1947), 159.

³American Scholar, XIX (Winter, 1949-50), 10.

⁴Ibid., p. 11.

⁵Ibid. (Spring, 1950), pp. 227-28.

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